Interview with Ambassador Mabel Murphy Smythe

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

Ralph J. Bunch Legacy: Minority Officers

AMBASSADOR MABEL MURPHY SMYTHE

Interviewed by: Ruth Stutts Njiiri

Initial interview date: June 2, 1981

Q: This is an interview with Ambassador Mabel Murphy Smythe, as part of the Phelps-Stokes Fund's oral history project on former Black Chiefs of Mission. Ambassador Smythe was the United State Ambassador to the United Republic of Cameroon from May 1977 to February 1980 and concurrently Ambassador to the Republic of Equatorial Guinea from December 1979 to February 1980. She was at the time of the interview Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Africa. This interview is being conducted on June 2, 1981, at the State Department, Washington, DC. Interviewer, Ruth Stutts Njiiri.

Ambassador Smythe, you have had the unique experience of being the wife of a former Chief of Mission and thereafter an ambassador in your own right. Unfortunately, the demise of your husband came before the Phelps-Stokes Fund was able to initiate this oral history project. Because Ambassador Hugh H. Smythe, your late husband, was a prominent internationalist and one of the earlier black Chiefs of Mission, I should like to ask you for some recollections on his years in the Foreign Service.

SMYTHE: He served in Syria and Malta. Ambassador Smythe was in Syria from October 1965 to June 1967, and then in Malta from December 1967 to August 1969.

Q: Ambassador Smythe, what were the circumstances which led your husband to the Foreign Service?

SMYTHE: When he was a student he wanted to go into the Foreign Service and had thought of starting with international law. Those were the days when it was extremely difficult for blacks to enter the Foreign Service, and he was not able to realize his ambition then. But I remember when about 1946 or 1948, the NAACP discussed the possibility of having blacks in the Foreign Service and Hugh was one of the candidates they recommended.

Both of us went down for an interview. (In those days a wife was recognized as part of the team that would be operating in the Foreign Service, and they wanted to interview both of us.) I don't remember a great deal about the interview except that it seemed to go well enough. But we were not appointed, nor was anyone appointed, to our knowledge. However, about that time, Ed Dudley, who was also on the NAACP staff, was appointed Minister to Liberia. Later on, when the rank of the chief of mission was raised to Ambassador, Ed became the first black ambassador in the Foreign Service.

Q: How was Hugh received in Syria and Malta?

SMYTHE: Very well. He had the kind of personality that went out to people and people responded very warmly to him. In Syria, some of them commented on the fact that he looked like many Syrians. And one man said to him, “You look like one of us, and I have several children who look like Americans (laughs)...”

But there seemed to be a sense of appreciation for the kind of warm interest he brought to the Arab people, especially at a time when Arabs were not widely known in the United States and most of the publicity given to the Middle East came from the Israeli, or the

Jewish, side. So the Arabs were not getting much of a press in the United States. They felt that he was willing to listen to what they had to say. And he suggested that they ought to talk more openly about the way they saw things rather than expecting the American public automatically to be on the other side.

Q: Did he find that there were serious conflicts in his ideas on policy toward Syria or Malta?

SMYTHE: He took issue with some official government policies. I remember in one case — I can't remember the issue now — but he sent a telegram of some length to the State Department explaining how he felt about an issue, involving even-handedness on the part of the Government in dealing with Israelis and Arabs.

The cable was repeated to other countries in the area and one after another wrote back to the Department: “We concur with Ambassador Smythe's analysis of the situation.” He felt that as an outside appointee who did not have a permanent career at stake, that he was perhaps freer to express some judgments than people who were looking toward a longer-range period of time in a career that was dominated by pro-Israeli sentiment.

But the Foreign Service officers who served in Arab posts were known to be more sympathetic to the Arab cause than people who had not had that kind of exposure. They saw it as simply understanding the issues from the side of the Arabs as well as the side of the United States. Incidentally, I didn't respond to your question on Malta. I completely overlooked the fact that you asked how he was received in Malta. He arrived there five months before I did. I remember arriving in Malta for the first time in June of 1968. He met me at the airport and announced that we were flying to Germany the next day on a NATO consultation. So I didn't get to see Malta for a few days. When I did make my first trip with him to a small town, some distance from the capital, I was astonished at his reception.

Apparently he was being interviewed on the news frequently and he was making visits to a number of places that were not very often visited by diplomats in Malta. The television

people got the impression that if they followed him, they would have some news to dispense on the evening television. So here was someone who had become a television personality. As our car drove through the streets, people would reach in to try to shake his hand, and I said, “It looks as if people think you're running for public office here.” But he explained why it was that they knew him so well. And I thoroughly enjoyed the cordiality that he seemed to receive wherever he went.

Q: Do you feel that this warm reception he received in Syria and Malta had anything to do with his being a man of color?

SMYTHE: I don't honestly know because both Malta and Syria have a mixed background, but the Maltese do not have very many people who are brown in complexion. The Syrians have some who are scattered through the population, and a great many of them are swarthy. But I was inclined to think it was partly the idea that a person representing the most powerful country on earth was as friendly and open to them as he was. He had a remarkable kind of rapport with the man in the street, and he identified with people who had problems and who were looking forward to making it in this world, because that had been the story of his life. It may be a symbol that evokes curiosity on the part of people seeing it. But there typically is not the kind of condescension that they sometimes expect from diplomats, and it may well have been an important element.

Q: Was your husband given a choice of places where he would serve or was that ...

SMYTHE: ...NO! (laughs)...

Q: ...arrangement made for him?

SMYTHE: He was approached with the question, how would you like to go, how would you like to serve overseas in a top post? And he said he'd be glad to serve his Government in whatever way he could do well. What was proposed and ultimately it came out; it was Syria. At that time we did not enjoy cordial relations with Syria. We had correct diplomatic

relations, but there was no special warmth in them. And the Syrian Government tended to be highly critical of the United States, as did many Arab governments at that time. So, when the proposal was made, it was made that he would not be, he... I quote one person as saying, “We're going to send you into hell”... (laughs)... because relations were very difficult at that time.

But that didn't discourage him. He rather liked the challenge of a tough assignment that other people might be discouraged at attempting. He liked the challenge of seeing whether he could overcome something that had been especially difficult. And to tell the truth, he seemed to have a personal kind of reception that was quite different from the official reception. People liked him as a human being and as a person, even when they had antagonist things to say about government policy. He tried to make use of this entree that he had personally, to persuade them to listen to the rationale behind the policy and to accept the necessities as we saw them. And in a way he had a measure of success, because our policy, while not as even-handed as it became later on, was one of trying to pursue the national interest as we saw it. And, clearly, the United States has to pursue its national interests as the other countries have to pursue theirs.

Q: Your husband was an appointee of President Johnson. What kind of cooperation do you feel he received from the State Department during that time?

SMYTHE: The State Department, under President Johnson, was cooperative and interested, but at the same time, there was a feeling on the part of the people in the field that what they said did not always have the impact that it should back in the United States.

Sometimes if Hugh felt something he said needed more emphasis than it was getting, he would take extra steps to attract attention to it; send an additional cable, reminding people that he had made a report to which they had not responded. Or sometimes he would come personally, and when he came to the United States on a visit he always set up a series of consultations. He'd go up on the Hill, for instance, on Capitol Hill, and talk with

members of Congress who were influential in policy matters and discuss with them what was happening in the field; how he saw the foreign policy of the United States received; what he thought they ought to understand in order to make informed judgments about policy themselves. This, of course, was with the encouragement and cooperation of the Department of State, which would make the appointments at his request and see that he was able to get to them.

Now, I think there is always a tension between the people who are in Washington and who try to see what is happening in the field, with the help of the people who are out there representing us, and who also from Washington must take a worldwide point of view and balance all the, all the claims from various parts of the world. It's a very difficult thing to ... reconcile all points of view. And one of the concerns of people who worried about it was making sure that they had been heard, that people understood what they were saying and put enough, attached enough importance to it to give it the weight it deserved. Well, obviously, how much weight should go to what thing varies with one's point of view. Every now and then people would complain, “They don't even read the reports that we write once they get back to Washington.”

But on the other hand, there were some times when Hugh felt very gratified by the reception to something that had been said. And we watched the change in policy as time went on and believed that people were becoming more aware of the point of view of the Arab people, and at the same time understood and weighed fairly what the people of Israel also had to contribute to the equation.

There were constant rivalries for attention. And, of course, the Middle East isn't always the main item on everyone's agenda, though it stood very high in domestic priorities. In all the time that we have been watching foreign policy, it's been an important element.

Q: You've mentioned the warm feeling that the people in Syria and Malta felt toward your husband. Did he have special access to the heads of state in these two areas?

SMYTHE: Well, I suppose one would have to say so in many. ways. In Malta, of course, here was a peaceful situation. Malta was on excellent terms with the United States at the time we were there. The two major... officially the head of state was the Governor-General, whom he had already met in Sierra Leone when he was Governor-General of Sierra Leone and — I'll think of his name in a minute — his name was Sir what, Dorman? Robert Dorman? Maurice Dorman, I believe; Sir Maurice Dorman. The Prime Minister, George Borg-Olivier, was the other. Both were cordial.

Sir Maurice and Lady Monica Dorman had had a long and illustrious career in Sierra Leone. And when they came to Malta and realized that they would be working with Hugh, whom they had met in Sierra Leone, they became cordial friends and he frequently enjoyed their company in informal ways. For instance, Lady Dorman loved to dance with him; he was a good dancer. And when there was a ball, she looked forward to a turn on the floor with him.

In the case of Syria, the chief of state was a more remote person and there was more difficulty about it. Before I leave Malta, I should mention also that the chief Maltese person was the Prime Minister, George Borg-Olivier. We had a cordial relationship. Pam (daughter) knew his children; visited back and forth with them. He died about six months ago, I believe, six months ago. But while we were in Malta, we always had a cordial and warm relationship with him, and he was a very easy person to know.

In Syria we had a series of difficult changes in government. Four and a half months after we arrived, the Chief of State was the victim of a coup and was put in prison. And the subsequent Chief of State Hugh saw occasionally, but there was a situation in which there was not a great deal of cordial give-and-take and relations were not as informal as they might have been. There was a military government. The ordinary diplomatic observances went by the board a bit and for a while we constantly had rumors of impending coups, so

that the Chief of State stayed very much to himself and he didn't have that easy informal relationship with the diplomatic corps that sometimes transpires.

I never saw the Chief of State in Syria. For one thing, women did not go to the presentation of credentials and families could not participate, so there was none of the informal opportunity to meet and talk with him that there might have been otherwise. I called on the wives of the members of the Cabinet and the week after I'd called on the last one, the coup took place and I had to start all over again ...(laughs)... because there were now different people in the Cabinet.

Q: Your husband was in Syria from October 1965 to June 1967 and then he went to Malta in December of 1967. Was there anything unusual about his serving these two places at that particular time?

SMYTHE: Not really- ah...well, I should say he was the first black ambassador to serve in the Middle East, and I am hard put to think of a subsequent black appointee. He may have been the only one to serve in the Middle East up to this point. And so that was unusual. He also was interested with a very ticklish kind of situation that required a deft hand to manage.

When Hugh went to Malta, there had been a couple of other people before who had served in Europe. Malta was officially part of the European area even though one could make a case for its being something a little different, a little more remote, because it was almost as close to North Africa as it was to Italy. It was only about sixty miles, as I remember, from Sicily; a hundred and eighty to Tunisia, I believe; and a little farther, a longer distance from Libya. We had a good many wives of the Libyan oil workers who were resident in Malta, where their children could get schooling and they could have a more relaxed life. Life in the Arab countries was not very easy for American women at that time.

He had a very good relationship with all of the American community. He tried to invite the wives, include then in a number of things. There were two hundred of them, so that made quite an addition, but every now and then there were affairs that could be large and where they could be invited.

I remember one time when the John F. Kennedy aircraft carrier was making its maiden voyage. It was to stop at Malta, and the commander wanted to have a special celebration. So they were going to put on a very well-rehearsed program of music and military drills and so on, and a reception with dancing. So the Navy sent word that it would be much appreciated if Hugh could find six hundred dancing partners for the men from the ship. Well, that is not an easy thing in a good Catholic country where girls are sequestered before marriage (laughs) ... but his relationships came in ... (laughs) ... were an advantage there. He called in one of the leaders of the oil wives and asked if she would organize them and ask them to form a kind of hospitality committee, invite all the wives to attend the affair and they could be dancing partners even though most of them would be older than the sailors. And if they had teenage daughters, they night bring them along.

He called the mother superior of the convent school — there was a teachers college run by Catholic nuns and the mother superior was a very good friend of his. And he asked her if she would like to take her student body to the affair and let them enjoy the show. He had, of course, informed the commandant that the boys were to be on their very best behavior and to be most formal and careful with the young ladies, because his credibility hung in the balance.

Well, between the wives and the student body, plus all the foreign, the foreign community that spoke English — there were a lot of English-speaking people who were in Malta and some of them had daughters the right age — and young wives of the community could also be dancing partners to some of the people aboard. Hugh got his six hundred dancing

partners and it was a gala affair that was talked about for months afterwards ... (laughs) ... as one of the biggest things that had happened in Malta.

And he was a creative kind of person in working out solutions to difficult problems. In thinking of, of what Malta was like at that time and the great care that people took in guarding their daughters from exposure before marriage, one could see that this would be very tough. But if you put the right chaperones in place, you could do it; and he did.

I remember on another occasion there was an exhibit of pictures of the astronauts who walked on the moon for the first time. Neil Armstrong, I remember, stepped on the moon while I was in Malta one summer; this was the summer of 1969, I think. And we were awakened at 5:30 in the morning for a statement on this grand occasion to be broadcast and to be published in the local newspaper. And it hadn't yet taken place. We sat before the television set and about six o'clock Malta time, six or six-thirty in the morning, it happened. But it was a stunning kind of thing to have happened.

The person in diplomatic service always has an advantage if there is something pleasant that can be shared with other people. And this kind of scientific feat was so mind-boggling that it captured the imagination of the whole world. And for a long time there was a great deal of discussion of it: photographs from it were on display at the Cultural Center; and a good deal of discussion of the whole issue of the exploration of space got a great deal of attention.

Well, he found ways of using this for entree into various places. He always tried to think, what could I do with the resources I have? Because he was ambassador in Malta at a time we were cutting the budget, and the budget for educational and cultural affairs had been cut by something like a third in one year. So he was trying to think of ways in which we could go beyond this and have an impact even though our money was not as plentiful as we would like.

When a space exhibit was made available, and it was made available around the world, right after the moon landing, he invited a great many people in Malta to come and see what was being shown, and explained about our space exploration. And one group of people who came represented the Maltese National Commission for UNESCO. Well, I was at that time a member of the National Commission for UNESCO in the United States. It was the one commission I did not have to resign when I went abroad as the wife of an ambassador.

So he arranged for me to give a tea for the Maltese National Commission and make available to them some additional information of the space exploration, and we had a chance to compare notes as to how we were teaching our various constituencies about the meeting of UNESCO and making it worthwhile.

Again, it didn't take a great deal of extra money, but when people landed in the, when sailors landed on our shores — and ships were always coming into Malta because it was a rallying point for the Sixth Fleet, our Mediterranean fleet — Hugh got to know the naval commanders very well. One of them later became the Chief of Naval Operations, later on.

But when the sailors would come in, he would look for projects that they could help with. I remember there was a camp for poor children in Malta and the sailors came in, painted the whole place, repaired the swings, put up book shelves, donated books to the book shelves and otherwise made the camps a more habitable place.

I remember on the day of dedication there were some sailors representing their ship to receive the thanks of the Ambassador and the director of the summer camp. And that day we were being served a collation during the ceremonies and something happened to the stove. It was one of these old cast-iron stoves, wood burning stoves.

Well, the sailors arranged to have that stove repaired ...(laughs)... The ships that put in had repair services and even a small foundry on board so that they could repair almost

anything that needed parts. They repaired the parts of the stove and got it in running order again, and the children came to spend their two weeks in camp before going and giving another group a chance at a two-weeks visit.

Those sailors also provided music for special events at the Embassy residence and that sort of thing. Making bricks without straw was one of Hugh's specialties when the budget was low.

Q: Very creative. You talked about his good relationships with Americans in Syria particularly. What kind of relationships did he have with members of the diplomatic corps?

SMYTHE: He was ... he was a favorite person in the diplomatic corps because he was so lively. You could always, you could always find something going on when he was around. He didn't drink; he was a teetotaler; didn't even take a glass of wine at dinner. And therefore, without having the problems of drinking, one got the liveliness that one associates ...(laughs)... with people who are having a good time at a party. He would encourage members of the corps who were a little standoffish to relax and enjoy whatever was there.

At the same time, I must say that he was not much for cocktail parties, and he cut them very short. He allowed himself twenty minutes to half an hour at a cocktail party ... (laughs)... That was long enough to go around and shake everybody's hands, see if there were any work to be done in the way of contacts to be pursued or discussions to be held, and then he was ready to go home. And our driver got in the habit of arranging for the car to be parked so that he could see the front door and drive up by the time Hugh got to the sidewalk, if there was a sidewalk. So he was known for staying only a short time at cocktail parties. But when it came to affairs where there was some substantive work to be done, he would stay as long as it was necessary to see that the work got done.

Q: Your husband was an ambassador-in-exile for a while. What does that mean?

SMYTHE: ...(laughs)... I call it ambassador-in-exile. When we left Syria, I went first. I went to Beirut, from Beirut to Athens, and from Athens to Rome. We were expected to go to Rome as directly as possible when we left Syria, as our safe haven, because Rome had a good many hotel rooms and the United States Government had reserved them in case of evacuation. So the Embassy in Rome gave the Embassy from Syria a small area, two or three small offices in which they could operate. And the officers literally went to those, those rooms and set up operations and proceeded to do what they would be doing anyway.

For instance, if there were a matter of trade with Syria, if somebody wished to know something about Syrian law, the people who normally would take care of that question would respond from Rome as if it were Syria. We had the Embassy to take care of. The wives and the children of the officers had been evacuated to Rome and their onward movements were taken care of by their own. officers in that Embassy-in-Exile. And if people in the United States wished to have the advice and counsel of any of them in dealing with Syria, they would cable Rome or telephone.

Now the point in setting up an embassy somewhere else is that you might expect your people to return. But after a while it became apparent that we were not going to return. So at the end of a period of time, we went back to the United States. In the case of Hugh and me, we returned to the United States three weeks after evacuation, as I recall. But others of the Embassy remained there until a decision was made to simply bring everybody back to Washington.

Always in the case of an outbreak of war there is some uncertainty as to how long it will last, and the first thing to do is to get people to a safe place. After you get them to a safe place, then it's possible to make arrangements for what comes next in light of what the circumstances are. And in this particular case, the initial thought was, “As soon as the Six-Day War is over, people will be back and things will be pretty much as they were.” But relations were broken off with the United States, with England and certain other countries,

and there was not a question of going back after that. Our national interest didn't require that we have someone there, so that there may not have been a special effort to re-establish relations at that point. There probably were a number of issues of that kind that had to be weighed and examined.

Ultimately the Embassy staff was simply brought back to the United States and reassigned and people went elsewhere. One man who had been evacuated to Greece was asked to stay in Greece and remained in Greece for two or three years, then went on to something else. That can happen. He didn't make a whole tour, but he was in Greece for a short period of time. That happened very often. One of our people who left Damascus on that trip ended up returning to Beirut and serving in the Beirut Embassy even though we were not reopening the Embassy in Syria.

Q: Can you think of anything that your husband, Hugh, might have wanted to disclose in an interview such as this about any situation or event which occurred that he did not talk about generally?

SMYTHE: I can tell you about a few such things. He took a very special interest in his middle-level officers. These are people who are, are not the junior officers who are just beginning. They're not the people who are senior officers and who therefore have something of an advantage in choosing posts or in knowing a lot of people who are influential in the Department. He was impressed by several people who were serving him well, and I remember two in particular: Gene Marthinsen and Bob Paganelli. Both of them have become ambassadors.

He felt that they needed a kind of support and encouragement that they might not always get at this point. And a lot of people who are very good but who don't get enough encouragement go on somewhere else. He felt the Foreign Service needed them. So he encouraged them and recommended them for promotion and got promotions for them, I

believe, and put in their files his evaluation of their future. And it turned out to be accurate from the point of view of other people, because, ultimately, they became ambassadors.

Another thing that he took an interest in was the way in which people evaluated employees. He felt very strongly about fairness. A supervisor in the Foreign Service has a great deal of influence over what one's future will be, because there is a rather searching and detailed evaluation that is done each year. And if this evaluation is done by someone who for personal reasons doesn't hit it off with the person concerned, it can exert a disproportionate amount of influence on other people's opinions in the future and may stand in the way of that person's future.

He found two or three people in that category who had been supervised by persons with less sympathy and concern for their welfare than they might have had and in one case he felt that he made a first-class officer out of a person who had been discouraged almost to the point of leaving by a predecessor.

Hugh tended to be a no-nonsense kind of person. He had a sense of humor and in appropriate times enjoyed his jokes, but he didn't do much joking on the job. A girl, the wife of one of the communications officers, got a local hire job typing in the Embassy. One day she had her two-and-half year old with her — something happened to her usual babysitter — and she brought him to the office and was trying to keep him occupied quietly while she was doing some typing. At one point she missed him and ran quickly through the Embassy to try to catch him, because there was no real barrier between the place where she was typing and where the Ambassador ... the Ambassador's office. Then she found him sitting... (laughs)... on the lap of the Ambassador, talking very earnestly with him, because Hugh liked children and enjoyed getting acquainted with them and felt that it was important for them to have a positive feeling about the place where their parents worked. But it was so funny years later to hear her tell how devastated she felt when she found that he had gone all the way into the Ambassador's office. That's just the human side of things.

If he were going to talk about his, his experiences; I think he'd want to tell you about one of his favorite stories.

When the time came for the Embassy to be closed ... well, before that. When the Six-Day War began, and he became aware of the fact as I was leaving. We had orders to evacuate all dependents so that a mother would take her children and drive to Beirut on a shopping trip and not come back. We were told not to say anything about it, just quietly to start evacuating.

I remember the first woman who went; she had three little girls. And they simply declared they were going on a shopping trip. They went to Beirut and rented a furnished apartment and stayed there. The next one that I remember was the wife of one of the officers whose uncle was visiting, and she accompanied her uncle as far as Beirut when he left and took her little daughter with her.

Nobody particularly turned around at these departures because they were so routine; one would do that anytime. But after a while it became apparent that there were some missing people... (laughs) ... in the American community. This was taking place over a period of weeks. And finally one day I ran into the Swiss Charg# and his wife and they said, “Mrs. Smythe, we hear you're evacuating your Embassy.” And I said, “Where did you hear that?” and talked with them about what they were doing and went on.

And the very next day was my departure day and the wife of the Deputy Chief of Mission was to go with me along with her two teenage children. We said goodbye to our husbands in the Embassy compound, and they went back into the building as we left the grounds. And as Hugh walked into the Embassy, a marine handed him a telegram saying that the Israelis had bombed Cairo and war had started. So he ran back out to tell our driver to go faster than usual, but we were already out of sight. So it was not until we got to the border that an Indian diplomat whom I knew called me and said, “Have you heard the news?” and told me that war had. begun.

Well, we succeeded in leaving because word had not gotten to the border. The border station would have closed down if they had gotten the news. But since they hadn't heard it we got through, and later on our driver was unable to return to Damascus that night because the border was closed... (laughs).

What Hugh did then was to return to his office, start things in motion for wartime preparations, and shortly thereafter, a mob of people came with rocks, armloads of rocks to throw at the Embassy in a kind of demonstration. So he and the marine on guard went outside his office upstairs where there were external shutters, and he and the marine went outside to close the shutters so the mob couldn't break the windows. And the rocks were falling down. all around them.

They were down where they couldn't be seen very readily from below and the rocks were falling all around them... (laughs) ... as they closed the shutters, but they succeeded in doing it and getting back inside before much damage was done. And once the shutters were in place, people couldn't have access and they couldn't break any more windows. Then he called the Syrians on the telephone and told them that they needed police protection, and the police came out and chased the mobsters away.

It was the suspicion of the Embassy, of course, that the Government had incited the mob to do this, have this demonstration. And there were other kinds of things like that that had to be dealt with.

He was minding his own business the next day or the day after that (I think it was the next day), when the German Embassy telephoned and said.: “Mr. Ambassador, we have our Consulate in Aleppo on the phone. They want to know whether they ought to close in view of the fire in your Consulate next door. How bad is the fire?” And that was the first he knew that the Consulate had been set on fire by demonstrators. So he got on the telephone to the Foreign Minister and said: “We understand that our Consulate is on fire in Aleppo”. This was, oh, it took us about four or five hours to drive to Aleppo — it was in the northern

part of Syria, closer to the Turkish border than we were. And the Syrians admitted that they had heard there was a fire, but they said, “We have rescued the people and they're safe ... We'll call you back.” And they called. back and said everyone was safe and that the Consul and his staff were all at a local hotel and were being sent across the border into Turkey.

So I saw those people last week; I was in San Diego and stayed with them. We were reminiscing about that experience. But what happened was that the Consulate was in a — we have a place where they destroy documents that they don't want to fall into the hands of anyone else — and he and his staff were in this interior room destroying documents and didn't know what was happening outside. And when they came out they found that the building was a wreck; furniture, broken glass, and rubble were on the stairs. The furniture in an apartment that was occupied by one of the officers had been piled in the middle of the floor and burned. The buildings themselves were of stone and concrete so that those wouldn't burn, but for a while they were afraid that the secretary who lived in that building and who was wife of one of the officers, might have been burned. They found her up on the roof. Her Syrian maid showed her how to get up on the roof and they were up on the roof with one other woman who was also in the Embassy, and they had to be rescued... (laughs)...and taken downstairs.

Q: What were the reasons given for this hostility toward the Americans?

SMYTHE: Well, the ... the Israelis had fired on shore in Lebanon, I believe it was. The Israelis had done some accurate bombing of airports and so on, and they had a ship that had attacked Lebanon at that point, and I believe, let me get the story together because I must remember it ... The Syrians declared that it wasn't possible for the Israelis to do this without help from somewhere and they decided that the help must have come from the United States and England, and broke relations with the two countries.

Now, someone recorded a wireless conversation between Nasser, the President of Egypt, and the King of Jordan, in which Nasser pressured the King of Jordan to say that he knew that Americans were attacking. And the King of Jordan said: “But they're not attacking and we have no evidence that they are.” And Nasser said: “If you don't say it, we're going to, we're going to boycott you or expel you from the Arab League” or something of that sort. They were going to bring pressure against him if he didn't go along with the program. So reluctantly the King of Jordan went along with the declaration that Americans and British must have been in this war; otherwise, the Israelis could not have conquered as quickly as they did. Well, that led to the breach of diplomatic relations between the Arab countries and the United States and Britain.

They asked Hugh to come to the Foreign Ministry and the Foreign Minister or, it may not even have been the Foreign Minister, informed him that relations were broken and that he was given forty-eight hours to clear his staff out of the country and telephone the Embassy. He said, “We can't do it in forty-eight hours. We have too much to do and it will take us longer than that.” They said, “Well, you may leave your most junior employee to finish up after you go.” Hugh said, “A junior employee can't do it. We need a senior person who knows very well what to do.” So they agreed to let the administrative officer, who is one of the senior officers in the Embassy, stay for two weeks and get everything packed and removed. All the houses had to be packed up and the household effects removed and all the rest of it.

So that was it ... Hugh didn't go to bed thereafter until he left. He went home and packed; he went back to the Embassy, put a plan in operation for closing down everything, destroying documents and so on. When they burned some of the documents, people saw smoke coming out of the Embassy and thought the Embassy was on fire... (laughs) ... and they sent out the fire department. Hugh also arranged for American citizens who wished to leave with the Embassy staff to come to the Embassy. Word was out in the community. And this was a terribly dramatic moment for some people.

There was one girl who had worked for ... I don't know whether she ever worked for the Embassy, but her husband was with Scandinavian Airlines. He was a Syrian. He would help with Embassy travel planning and that sort of thing. She was from Iowa, of Syrian parentage, and she had married a Syrian. They had three children. She couldn't make up her mind whether she wanted to leave him and take the children home or not, and it was a dreadful time for her. There were other people with similar kinds of problems, mostly Americans married to Syrians. Sometimes the mothers were permitted to go but couldn't take the children without the permission of the husband, and that was another trauma. But in the end, about a hundred and fifty people were escorted to the border and left, taking their cars and whatever precious items they wanted. They could take only one suitcase each of no more than fifty pounds.

And we dependents had already left taking small suitcases, because we didn't want to be burdened. In evacuation, baggage is a great problem. And so you should take what you most value and what you will need immediately and plan simply to get some more of whatever you need where you go. And so we had gone out with one suitcase each, and I was, of course, safe in Rome, or Athens at that time. And Pam and I were in Rome by the time the American Embassy people got there. And so were most of our Americans, but some were still left in Athens for a while.

We had one family that was on vacation, not in the United States but in Europe, but reuniting them with their children who had been left in the American school in Beirut as boarding students was quite a feat. And that got accomplished. But the system of evacuation is a very interesting thing to see.

Now Hugh went home every night and directed the packing of our household effects and took a catnap or two but not very much real sleep, and he had a trusted servant who remained. She was later, long after we left, she was ejected by the Syrians. She had a Lebanese passport. And she is now in the United States with her children, who succeeded in coming out, too. So she's now living in the States. But she saw to it that our household

effects were packed and not pilfered, and thanks to her we have just about everything we had. We lost very little in the evacuation except perishable things like groceries and that sort of thing.

Q: You were fortunate that no hostages were taken.

SMYTHE: That's right. And we were fortunate that when they sacked and burned our Consulate in Aleppo that they didn't really harm the people in it. But the staff came out after the fire and they couldn't go down the steps with all the rubble on the steps and the broken glass and so on. So they had to go down hand over hand on ropes and they burned their hands pretty badly going down. They had to be medically treated.

And one woman had no clothes left. They had put the clothes in the center of the ... room and set fire to the clothes and the furniture. So she had what she was wearing and nothing else. They got to Turkey where we had an air force base and they were able to buy clothes to wear home and that sort of thing: their immediate needs.

But it was a very interesting thing. We were most grateful that no one was injured other than the people who had the rope burns. And one man, our defense attach# was so relieved when he got to the Turkish border and was safe on the other side, with his passport back, that he fainted and hit his head on the side of a taxi and got a concussion and had to be taken to the hospital... (laughs) ...but that was, that was really, except for the burned hands, the only casualty.

And the Syrians, I think what they meant to do was to have a kind of protest and raise a lot of noise but not really to harm the people, many of whom they valued as persons ... (laughs). It was a very exciting time and by the time the Embassy was closed the Italian Embassy had been asked to take it over. The last official act before our staff left was to run down the American flag and put up the Italian one. Hugh carried that lag himself when he left. He turned it in when he got to the Embassy in Rome.

That was a very exciting kind of thing to remember. One of the things that I think is an interesting little human sidelight is that Marian (what was her name?) rock and roll star. She came to Syria while I was in Paris meeting Pam; this was in 1966. 1 had gone to Paris for a little vacation and to meet my daughter and my niece who were coming out to visit us. My niece, Ann, was going to spend a. couple of weeks; Pam was going to spend all. summer. We were going to spend a week together in Paris before the girls went to Syria. I had spent three weeks in Paris before they arrived.

While we were there, Marian Williams (I think that's the name) and her troupe came to Syria to perform on a series of cultural presentations. Hugh joined her in leading the audience in a kind of march around when they came to “When the Saints Come Marching Home.” And they had such a good time, and she was such a crowd pleaser that it really gave a lift to the morale of the whole diplomatic corps that were there. The Syrians enjoyed it thoroughly, too.

Hugh also became a kind of father confessor to some of the Syrian young people who wanted to come study in the United States. We had always had an interest in foreign students and there were a number of people who had children that wanted to come study in the United States. I remember one girl with whom Hugh worked a long time. He was helping her to understand how to get a scholarship and so on, and we were not sure, but at the last minute, just before things seemed to be working out, she decided that she didn't want to come to the United States. She had fallen in love and wanted to get married. And we were never sure whether her parents were bringing pressure on her to marry the young man or whether it was a totally free choice. But she was a very charming young woman and seemed to be a bright student who would have done well in the United States.

There was another girl whose family had been extremely influential, but their property had been nationalized by the Syrian Government and they were no longer in the commanding position that they once had held. Their family home had been taken over for Government use. Rima came to Smith College and did extremely well, graduated and married an

American and is now living... (laughs) ... in the United States. We had a number of young friends like that and I'd like to know what happened to them.

There was also an orphanage that became a special Embassy project. This was a Muslim orphanage and many people who had children that they didn't want or felt that they couldn't keep, would leave them in the Mosque. The priests in the Mosque would turn there over to an orphanage of this kind.

Well, the first time I ever went to the orphanage, I was taken by the wife of one of our junior officers who had undertaken it as a special hobby to try to do things for them. And I began to collect some clothing for them and, frankly, to feed them.

My first visit to the orphanage took place one summer day. I took the middle seat on my sofa and almost immediately a little toddler came and stood by my knees and she looked so appealing. I picked her up and put her on my lap. And then I found two toddlers coming close and I thought, they want some attention too. So I put one on each side and put my arms around them. And then there were more coming. One little girl couldn't get a place to sit or a hand to hold; she leaned over and kissed my knee to let me know that she was there.

These kids were communicating that they needed somebody to touch and to hold them sometimes. So I decided that I would go to the orphanage every now and then and see what I could do. We were, as I said, making clothes or collecting clothes for them. And then one day I was there for meal time. And what they were eating was rice and yogurt with a little tomato sauce on it. And I thought, that's not a very well-balanced meal. I inquired to see what they received to eat, and they didn't receive very much. People had tried giving them meat, but there were two or three women who worked there who had families of their own that didn't have meat and they'd take the meat home to their own families. So I said, well, let's take then to my garden and have a. play time for them and while they're there we'll feed them a meal.

So we put our heads together and decided that what they needed was meat and vegetables. So we took a big piece of meat, cut it up small and cooked it with green and yellow vegetables. I said, “Light on the potatoes; we don't want much in the way of potatoes; we don't want rice; we don't want bread because they can get those things at the orphanage. Let's have what they don't get.”

And so as the time approached, I said, “Now that was silly of me. These kids aren't used to eating this food. They're not going to like it.” It was summer, and our teenagers were at home. I had lined up all the Embassy children, especially the teenagers and older kids, down to the age of seven, and I assigned each American child one orphan. And so each one was supposed to see that that orphan had something to play with, follow him or her around, give them all a good time, and then sit down and feed them.

Well, the meat and vegetable pot came out and do you know, my little two-and-half-year old ate three bowls of it and everybody else... (laughs) ... couldn't get enough. And we had plenty of it, so everybody got his fill. And I said, “Now maybe, maybe they understand what they need to eat. I'll just do this every week; I'll see that they get a good meal.”

So the next time I had them over ... no, my parents came to visit and this wasn't the next time; this was two or three times later, and the children had gone back to school. This was in September. So I said, “You would like to see my orphans. Why don't I bring them over?” So I invited them over and we had a small group, maybe six or eight, not the whole bunch. We had had all of them before except the little babies in arms.

And so when time came, out came the meat pot and the children knew how to feed themselves. Nobody wanted to eat. And 1 had one little fellow on my lap and so I fed him, and he ate pretty well. So I knew it wasn't the food. Well, when I finished with him, he went back to play and here came another one to sit on my lap. They wanted to be held and fed. Food didn't have meaning without the human warmth. So I went through that exercise and

I learned something then, and from then on I tried to have enough people around so they could be fed.

I took my father — he was eighty-three then, and this was his first trip abroad — I took him back to the orphanage when I returned them to the orphanage and he went in with me so he could see it. And those children were perfectly willing to go to bed, but everyone wanted to be kissed goodnight. So I had to go around to all the little ... (laughs) ... beds and give them their goodnight kiss before they'd settle down and go to sleep. And he was more moved by those orphans than anything else he saw on that trip, I think: the importance to children of having somebody to touch and to hold.

Hugh was very fond of those orphans and liked to see them. He would come by and go through and touch all the hands when he came home. Because we dealt with them during the day, he was usually at work when we had them over, though. He went to work at six o'clock in the morning, because he could do his reading while nobody was around.

Once people came, there were always people trying to talk with him, the telephone was ringing and so on, and he didn't have time to do the reading. He liked to stay on top of things, so he went to work early. He had an early breakfast and then came back for lunch. We had a pleasant lunch usually on our sun porch and often we had to go out to dinner or at least to a cocktail party or reception before dinner. He counted up the number of invitations we had our first year in Syria and they came to more than eight hundred, which is quite a lot. But remember, it was nothing for us to have to go to two or three in one night and that didn't count the coffees in the morning or the bridge parties or teas during the day. Sometimes there'd be luncheons and dinners as well. But it was a fascinating time.

Q: I'd like to talk a little bit more about some of your personal experiences in Syria and Malta. But before we do that, there is a very sensitive question I'm going to ask before we leave the period of the war. I think for the record, it's important to have your views. As

well as you can remember, do you feel that the United States had any complicity in the bombing of Lebanon?

SMYTHE: No. It wasn't in our national interest to bomb Lebanon. It was in our national interest to keep Lebanon a zone of peace, because Lebanon, first of all, was a friendly country. We had no problems with the Lebanese Government in terms of just national friendship. It was a place where we had access to the Middle East. We had no stake whatsoever in having Lebanon bombed, and it would not have been sensible to cut out the best access we had to that whole area. There are a lot of places where a change of government might have been in our interest, but Lebanon was not one of them.

Q: It's important for this particular project to have some background on your husband, and I'd like to get that from you before we go into some experiences that you had. Would you tell me about Ambassador Smythe's birth place, and his parents and relatives, any one who influenced him in his career?

SMYTHE: He has written up his early life in part in a book whose title I'll remember later on ... Frank Williams has a chapter in it as well, that tells of his forebears. But his background was that he grew up in Pittsburgh, where he was born. His mother came from Virginia and her parents moved from Virginia to Pittsburgh. You know, I'm not sure about that, now that I think of it. He speaks of his grandmother in Pittsburgh, but I'm not sure his grandfather intended to stay in Pittsburgh, and his grandparents broke up on the question of where they should live when Hugh's maternal grandfather went back to Virginia.

Hugh was one of five children. His older brother Richard lived at his grandmother's because he had a bad burn when he was a child. Uncle Richard was overcoming the handicap of that burn and getting some corrective medical treatment, he lived with his grandmother. But his mother was a very strong person, although not a very big person, who was determined to bring her children up well. And Hugh says that his mother and grandmother had more influence on him than anyone else throughout his life.

His mother taught piano at one time, but his father died when he was three and she went into domestic service to help support the family. Hugh was the next to the youngest of the five children. The daughter, I believe, was the oldest, and then there were four boys.

They were not as close a family as ours in many ways. They didn't do a lot of visiting back and forth. But when they were growing up, they apparently helped each other and stuck together in spite of the difficulties. Hugh started selling newspapers when he was five years old. He was an alert child who saw what was going on around him and when he was quite young, he came into the activities of the YMCA in Pittsburgh. Max Bond was the director of athletics there and developed a fondness for him... and decided that he was interested in influencing this child. Max put Hugh on basketball teams, in track meets and that sort of thing.

And so Hugh grew up being a minor athlete and he found out that if you could box, you could get five or ten dollars for a boxing match. So he tried earning money by boxing and did occasionally — he never looked forward to it as a career — simply to earn money. And he said once he had had his tonsils out and there was a boxing match coming up, and even though he had just gotten out of the hospital with his tonsils, he took part in the boxing match. He had warned the other fellow not to hit him in the head and the other fellow slipped and hit him where it started the tonsils bleeding, and Max Bond got terribly upset and thought he was hurt. He says, “Oh no, I just had my tonsils out.” Max was horrified... (laughs) ... but Hugh was the kind of plucky fellow who thought he could outsmart the odds, make a little money, and use it to advantage.

And with the help of Max Bond he saved up enough money to go to Virginia State College where he got in as a resident because his grandfather was living in Virginia, and so he signed in as a resident student. Otherwise he couldn't have afforded to go to college.

But he carried a job all the while he was in college and carried extra credits. I don't know quite how he did it, but he told me that there was one quarter when he was carrying

something like twenty-six quarter hours... (laughs) ...I don't know how he scheduled them or arranged them, but if I remember correctly that was what he said.

He worked at a funeral home and he sometimes did other things, odd jobs around whenever he could get them. But he got enough steady employment to keep him going. Except one semester when he got a notice from the business office that he was in arrears and they would have to put him out of school if he couldn't settle up by a certain date. Well, he wasn't able to settle up by that date so he left school and took a job on the railroad and earned enough money and then came back. And the business manager said, “What happened to you?” He said, “Well, you said I had to settle up and I just didn't have the money.” He said, “Well, a student like you could have — we could have found some arrangement, but you didn't come and ask me.”

Well, that was the kind of person Hugh was. If he had an obligation he would do it. And he didn't know that exceptions are made for good students. He graduated with honors. He and Herman Branson, now president of Lincoln University, were the leading scholars of their class and they were the chief rivals for honors in all sorts of things. Both of them did well and they had respect for each other throughout their lives.

In spite of all the problems, he did graduate. I think at graduation he still owed some money and had to wait until he paid it to get his diploma. But that was typical of the way he went through school.

He was very fond of Virginia State College and considered it the most beautiful campus there was and felt very much indebted to John M. Gandy, who was then president of Virginia State, and Luther Foster, Senior, who was business manager. Both of them were instrumental in helping him make ends meet and find jobs and so on. And when we were married, John Gandy, Junior, was his best man. Hugh kept in touch with Gandy and to some extent with Foster, the rest of his life. Virginia State was a very important part of his life.

He encountered W.E.B. DuBois when he went to Atlanta to work on the National Youth Project under Ira Reid. Dr. Reid was the chairman of the Sociology Department at Atlanta University then, I believe, and shortly thereafter DuBois came back. DuBois had taught at Atlanta University in the early 1900s. My mother, who graduated in 1909, was a student of his and knew him personally on the campus.

DuBois cane back about 1936 or '37 to Atlanta; maybe '35 or '36. And so he worked with DuBois as a student. DuBois liked him and about 1944 to '45 hired him to work as his assistant after we were married. Hugh worked on a Land Grant College Survey with DuBois in those years.

Later on, after DuBois had left Atlanta University, Hugh joined DuBois in New York and worked with him there. He was working with DuBois just before DuBois left the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in the, about 1945 or thereabouts. So he was, 1945, '46, I believe, '46, '47, he worked with DuBois at the NAACP. DuBois was a very important influence on his life. He knew him well and I remember his saving all sorts of mementos of DuBois.

When DuBois left Atlanta University after a disagreement with the president of Atlanta University, he was throwing out some books that he wouldn't need anymore and among them were murder mysteries. Well, Hugh didn't read murder mysteries and at the time, neither did I. But we felt that anything that had been used by DuBois ought to be saved. I ultimately read many of the murder mysteries and found them an interesting and easy way to relax. They had his name stamped in them, so I gave them away over the years to people who wanted something that had belonged to DuBois. And to give a student something that once belonged to DuBois has real meaning in these days.

But he shared a great deal of DuBois' sense of uncompromising integrity. He was outspoken when he felt something needed to be said; he had great courage and spoke out. And many people said that to me when he died — one of the things that they

remembered was that he had the courage to speak out when many people were fearful of the consequences. He felt that all of us had to work very hard to see that there was greater freedom and participation for blacks, and he would not be satisfied until the freedom applied everywhere, not just in special circumstances, but across the board.

I'm trying to think. Ira Reid was another person who had very deep, a deep relationship with him. He admired Dr. Reid. Ira Reid stood for high standards, and Hugh enjoyed working with him and learning how Ira operated. He had a very strong respect for him, a great deal of respect for him and his work.

At that time Atlanta University had a number of eminent scholars. Mercer Cook was there; Rayford Logan was there; John Hope was the president of Atlanta University. Hugh felt it was terribly important for people of this calibre to continue educating the young, and that they ought to be confronted with people who had a high regard for scholarship.

Always as a teacher he was interested in what happened with his students and would help them sort out things that interfered with their work. Students would come to him with personal problems. One girl for instance, said that in her family they believed in educating the boys but not the girls and she was determined to go to graduate school. He stuck with her and helped her organize applications for fellowships and that sort of thing and remained a sort of counselor to her, and later her sister, until he died. It was not surprising that at the memorial service for him, one of the nurses who had attended him in his last illness came up to me and said, “Do you know the day before he died I was studying for an examination and he helped me go over the questions!” So that she saw him still as the teacher who helps students. Even when he was so weak he really could not do very much for himself, he still felt he had something to contribute to young people coming along.

He was for the last twenty years of his life on the faculty at the City University of New York - dividing his time between Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center. That kept him in contact with students who were used to enormous classes, and very often the students

didn't know anyone that they were sure could tell who they were. When they needed letters of recommendation, they'd ask him to write because they said, “You're the only one who knows who I am and can tell about me.” So he had a great many letters in his files written about his students which suggested the range and depth of the relationships he had with them.

I received some very moving letters from some of those students when he died, some who had obviously used him as a sort of substitute father in trying to map out their lives. One of them said that she would have dropped out of school a long time before if it hadn't been for him. He felt that she shouldn't, that she had a mind and ought to develop it. And if it hadn't been for him she thought she would have given up, because her parents really did not feel that education was suited to a woman.

There's a young man now in the Foreign Service who came to call on me before he left for Brazil a few months ago. He said he would not be anywhere near the Foreign Service or anywhere else if it hadn't been for Hugh's encouragement. The interesting thing was, I don't believe he had been Hugh's student. He had come to Hugh for information about something and Hugh was impressed with his attitude and his general explanation of what he wanted to do, and gave him some counseling and direction. And he came back and asked for Hugh's opinion on another occasion and they became friends in that fashion. He was one of the people who during the last illness would make sure that Hugh heard from him every now and then and knew that he was concerned. And after I left the United States, he would look out for Pam; if she needed any help, he would give it. There were a number of people who felt that way.

One of them ...I...I mentioned the two young men we had in our Embassy in Syria who later became ambassadors. One of them heard that Hugh was ill and telephoned from the Persian Gulf to ask how he was. This was just before he went back to the hospital in his last illness, and Hugh was not able to come to the telephone and asked me to speak to him. And he wept over the telephone when Hugh died. He said, “I learned so much in the

Foreign Service from Hugh." He said, "He was one ambassador who understood what his job was and who felt that he was there to support the national interest and made me feel that I must do the same thing."

So ... his testimony, his feeling that his life had been changed by Hugh was of a great deal of interest to me, because there is sometimes a distinction made between people who are appointed from outside the Foreign Service to the job of ambassador and those who have grown up in careers with the Foreign Service. He felt that Hugh knew the Foreign Service and how to use it better than career people that he had known.

Q: What do you think he would have told young people about the Foreign Service?

SMYTHE: He felt very strongly that the Foreign Service was one way in which we represent America and that it must be representative. He also saw it as a place of personal liberation, that people who have lived a more narrow life, always in the United States, always among familiar cultures, grow a lot when they go to another place where they have to adjust to somebody else's way of doing things, some other culture's values and procedures. He advised many young blacks to go into the Foreign Service and to start before they had family responsibilities so they'd be free to go over and stay for two or three years and find out what it meant to them. He did a good deal of speaking on the subject and talking to young people about it.

He tended to see the world in, in large terms, and it seemed to him terribly important for young people to encounter the world and to get as broad a base as they could. He saw the Foreign Service as one way of having a career that really would contribute to the future of mankind. There is so much that needs to be communicated among people who see things differently.

I remember his discovery of the difference in attitudes toward things, some of the conversations he had with Japanese. Japan was his first overseas experience. And he felt it was important to reach out and understand other people and conquer that difference,

that gulf between societies. He was, in the final analysis, really a peace maker. He saw this as the way to achieve world peace and the way to become much more able to leave succeeding generations a world in which they could function with greater satisfaction. and happiness.

But the job is a tremendously big one and he did see that those who remained at home sometimes contribute a great deal to the happiness of all of us. We need those who stay at home as well as the ones who go out and seek the rest of the world. But his favorite corner was seeking the rest of the world, and he wanted to take as many young people as he could with him into that experience.

That is why he was so interested in Crossroads Africa. He first got interested in Japan when Jim Robinson came to speak and stayed in our home in Japan. We took part in the planning and for years we used to go over the applications and help select which students ought to be appointed, which ought to be turned down. He went over himself as a staff member in 1960. When the Belgian Congo became independent and there were all kinds of difficulties with getting things started and the Belgians were evacuating their nationals, he was in Ghana and would go to see the planes as they came through on their way home with the evacuees.

He was not a person to fool himself and be falsely optimistic about things. He saw the grave difficulties and one time when someone asked him — after we left Syria, he was constantly being asked to serve on boards of agencies like the Holy Land Center or the American Friends of the Middle East or the Near East Foundation or whatever. And there were a great many of them to which he gave time.

But one of the things that he said when people asked him for an easy solution to the Middle East and said, “What do you see ahead?” was “What I see ahead is more of the same.” He said, “It's going to take a very long time to resolve the issues. The problems did not grow up overnight; they aren't going to evaporate. We are going to have to work very

long and hard to make the Middle East a zone of peace and a place where people can go without worry for their personal security." He didn't expect it to happen very soon, but he was willing to put out all kinds of energy to bring it about and to encourage those who would help bring it about faster.

I think if he were going to go back and find places where he had been happiest, he would want to go back to the small town in Japan where he taught and where, because of his efforts, a number of his colleagues got to the United States to do advanced degrees. I think he'd want to go back to Thailand where he was helping people to develop a national research council that would have the ability to get basic data from which one could draw information useful in forming policies. He enjoyed Thailand; he thought a great deal of his year there.

I think he would consider all Africa his beat, not just one part of it, although he spent more time in Nigeria than in other countries. He saw Africa partly through DuBois' eyes. DuBois was interested in the Pan-African movement and saw Africa as growing stronger as it developed the means of working together effectively. And I think Hugh's wish to see the Organization of African Unity become increasingly strong and effective and truly democratic grew partly out of his association with the Pan-African philosophy that DuBois had.

He had a great affection for what Africa could mean and what it was coming to be and had strong ties with a great many of his African friends. But ultimately in his last... seven years of life — we didn't realize that he had only seven or eight years when he left the Foreign Service in 1969 — we hoped he would be able to go back into the Foreign Service and, to tell the truth, someone told me that he was being considered for another embassy when his health made it impossible.

When I was appointed to Cameroon, we both underwent our physical examinations and by then his health obviously made it impossible for him to go into the Foreign Service again.

But I was hoping at the end that he would be able to go to Cameroon with me, and I hoped that the post that they had selected for him would be announced even though he would not be able to take it, because I think it would have cheered him up again to think in those terms, to have a final stamp of approval on what he had done and what he had given in the intervening years to his country.

But he wasn't able to live and see it, but he did live to know that I had taken the oath of office. I wanted to postpone the oath of office until he could be present and he said, “No, you can't start your work until you take the oath, so go ahead and take it. I'll be better later on.”

But he knew that he was not going to be much better later on because the doctor had been frank with him, and he began talking about that time of his lack of interest in remaining alive if he could not be independent. He hated poor health. He wouldn't admit to poor health and it took a great deal of pressure on his health to make him give up and go see a doctor about it... (laughs)...As to his last illness, I was in Africa at the time he became ill, and my daughter found him in pain and insisted on calling the doctor. He said, “Well, wait until day; I'll be all right.” She went on and called anyway. And the doctor, who is a dear friend, came and told him he would have to go to the hospital, and it was at the hospital that they did the tests that revealed what was really wrong. But he was not one for being an invalid. He was a stoic to the end. and didn't believe in complaining.

I grew up in a family where you got a great deal of cosseting when you didn't feel well. Being ill was a time of great indulgence, and no one minded saying, “My stomach hurts today,” because it meant wonderful attention from Mother. Well, I began keeping to myself complaints about health when I wasn't at my very best. I would still go take care of it, but I wouldn't talk about it too much because he was a real stoic; he didn't believe in any physical complaints. Sometimes I had to ferret out the fact that he wasn't feeling so well, because he wouldn't always tell me... (laughs)...

I'm trying to think of anything else that is, is especially interesting. You know, I know one thing. When it came to civil rights and to how people dress and wear their hair and so on, he was truly willing to let people have freedom to do what they wanted to do and that, it seemed to him, was the ultimate deprivation of civil rights, to keep a person from being able to realize his potential or do something that he could achieve simply because he was black or foreign-born or whatever else. He was acutely conscious of this and felt that as a true individualist, he felt that people decide for themselves, provided, of course, they did not interfere with the social good. He had no defense of people who were doing something that might be harmful to other people.

I remember when people began wearing their hair in unconventional ways and so on. He said he preferred wearing his hair conventionally and he always wore it close-cropped. But if someone wished to wear longer hair he says, “Well, that doesn't really bother me. As long as they keep it clean and it doesn't interfere with what they're doing, I have no objection to that.”

On the other hand, he did like to see neatness, trimness. And so it was on the grounds of personal taste that he would like to see things very much in order. He almost made a fetish of orderliness. He believed in having things organized so he knew where he was going and what came next; he wasn't an impulsive person at all. He was compulsively neat about having everything put away and not leaving dirt around. He couldn't stand dirty people or dirty places. He wanted to see everything swept and polished and manicured and so on.

On the other hand, when he was working you couldn't always tell precisely where things were. He would sometimes simply stack work he hadn't gotten to in a pile, but if he wanted something he knew where to find it. He could go to it and put his hand on it very quickly.

He was, perhaps, especially neat about housekeeping. I think his mother must have been a wonderful housekeeper. I didn't meet her until shortly before she died. We were poor students in school and she moved to California, before I met her, to live with Hugh's

brother who was there. It was a better climate for her and so on. So she lived in California but she wrote very often, wrote long letters, and she liked to save things for me. When she broke up housekeeping for herself, she took some things to California with her and when we got our first apartment, she sent me a whole trunk with things that she thought I would like to have: a hand-painted China tray for toilet articles, for example. Things of that kind. A set of silver-plate for everyday wear in the kitchen, towels, and wash cloths, dish cloths, and other household linens and utensils.

I think she had a special spot for Hugh and I think I understood why she had it, because (he told me) when she would come home from work, he would be waiting up for her and they would sit down and have a cup of tea together. And she would talk to him and he would tell her what he was doing in school. She grew up feeling that this child was going to do what she wanted him to do, which is to have an upstanding life and to do something that would make a contribution, and I think he felt that. And he missed her very much when she was far away.

I remember how fond she was of Pam, my daughter, who was her second grandchild. When she first looked at Pam, she said, “Oh, she's such a beautiful baby.” Loved having a grandchild who was, Pam was at that time six or seven months old. She was a very friendly baby who would break out in a big smile when anyone paid attention to her and she seemed never to have to cry. She wasn't uncomfortable very often, and she was in good health. So Mom loved having this jolly kind of baby who was always smiling at her, and I'm glad she got to see her before she died.

Hugh was not terribly close to his brothers; the one he was closest to is his brother Dick, his oldest brother. Dick still keeps in touch. He has a feeling of wanting to look out for me because I was “Hughie's” wife, and I hear from him every now and then. He doesn't forget to send a birthday card or a Christmas gift or whatever. He was always very proud of his younger brother. He was a newspaper reporter, inclined to get around with the people on the street. He knew how to walk among them and be accepted as one of them and he saw

this brother, who was living mostly an academic life, or Foreign Service life, as ... as one side of his life that he would like to have developed.

So when Hugh was sworn in, he brought his two grandchildren to the swearing-in with him. One of them was only, oh, I suppose about ten years old. So he joined the receiving line, and his name was Smythe, too, and people thought he might be our son... (laughs). He was a dear youngster; they both were.

But Hugh's family wasn't terribly close, so we didn't see them as constantly as we might have seen members of my family, who tend to visit back and forth much more. We keep in touch; we're a close-bound group.

But Mother felt toward Hugh as if he were a real son, because to tell the truth, Mother knew him before I did. He went to Atlanta on a fellowship. He was to get his master's degree that year and work with Ira Reid on a project which would provide the funds, so that he'd be killing two birds with one stone. And the first week or two he was in Atlanta, a friend who knew Mother took him by our house and they played bridge. Mother was very fond of a good bridge game. And so in playing bridge with her, he got to know her.

He took a class with a sister of mine — who is closest to my age of all the children — and by the time I got there, he was a pretty well-established friend of the family. I was at Mount Holyoke that year and wasn't in Atlanta, but I met him at the end of my first teaching year when he came back to Atlanta on a visit, and we began corresponding and never let go after that.

My appointment isn't until twelve thirty so I'm okay. Have we finished all your questions?

Q: There was one thing I wanted to ask about. I believe he served on a committee at the United Nations.

SMYTHE: He was a member of the U.S. Mission staff at the United Nations. That's an interesting story. Harlan Cleveland, who was then, I think, Dean of the Maxwell Graduate School at Syracuse — I'm not quite sure of his title — called Hugh in 1961 to ask him to work for Syracuse on a summer program for graduate students they were having in Nigeria. And Hugh, as an expert on Nigeria, was to supervise their studies over the summer and to advise on placement and help introduce them to people in Nigeria, and so on. And he accepted.

Whereupon Harlan Cleveland got named Assistant Secretary of State in some capacity ... for International Organization Affairs, I think; I'm not quite sure. But when Harlan went to the State Department he asked if Hugh could join in the effort and suggested him for a post at the United Nations, in our Embassy at the United Nations. So instead of going on the Syracuse assignment, Hugh was in the U.S. Mission to the United Nations from about June of 1961 until September of 1962, September or October; he worked on Adlai Stevenson's staff. He worked very directly with Philip Klutznick, who has just been Secretary of Commerce in the Carter Administration and who was then Ambassador to the Economic and Social Council.

He and Phil Klutznick worked very well together and seemed to have the same kind of approach to a number of issues and ideas and respected each other's abilities, so they became firm friends. Hugh remained until the end of 1962, toward the end of '62, when he went back to the City University. He had taken a leave to do this job for two summers and the year in between. I forgot; it was really almost two years that he was involved in it. And it fired his interest in the Foreign Service all over again and so he began again ... remember he had gone to Japan in the early '50s; he had gone to Africa in the later 1950s; and he had worked at USUN (US Mission to the United. Nations) .... he kept his interest in going overseas and in 1963 he went as a Fulbright professor to Thailand. That gave him an additional Asian exposure that was very useful. And when he came back, he decided

that he wanted to have an appointment that would take him overseas and give him a chance to build on the experience he already had.

So Hugh went back home after his year overseas in Thailand, spent a year there and at the end of that time, they began ... Lyndon Johnson had been elected in his own right and was now ready to appoint some ambassadors of his own. So ...

Hugh had undertaken a series of assignments. He taught at the Foreign Service Institute occasionally and prepared people to go out and work in the Foreign Service. One of the things that we used to do together was deliver a lecture on the role of black Americans and the relationship between the role of black Americans and what went on overseas and our policies toward other countries. And we went to the Foreign Service Institute and the Staff College in Norfolk speaking on this subject and on cross-cultural adaptation and other things.

Q: Can we go back now and talk a little bit about your experiences in Syria and Malta as the wife of Ambassador Smythe?

SMYTHE: I was ... once in a while I made speeches. For example, I think I mentioned that I went to Cyprus for a week to speak for the U.S. Information Service there and gave a series of talks on American education, which were of interest to the local people who were trying to work out an educational system that would serve the Greeks and the Turks, and otherwise suit Cyprus.

One of the speeches I made during that period was in Damascus. The Embassy had asked all officers to ... and dependents, anyone who had something to present, to give a series of presentations to Syrians. So I volunteered to do a talk on the American economic system. I'd been struck with the fact that people considered absentee landlords a great evil in Syrian society and one of the reforms was to get land out of the hands of absentee landlords. So they wanted to know how our absentee landlords fared and so on. And. I had to explain that in the United States, this was not a major problem in the rural areas; that a

great many people owned agricultural land, and there was not a problem of getting land, as there was in Syria. Even if you had money you couldn't buy land there, because all the land was attached to families and it was just not traded in.

So when I mentioned the fact that people could buy land and described a totally different system, they were intensely curious of how this came about. Anyway, that is ... the talk was not just about land; it was also about wages and economic aspirations and standards of living, and so on. People were fascinated by the differences in the two societies. And one man, thinking he was giving me a great, great compliment, said, “That is the best talk: I've ever heard by a woman.”... (laughs). Syrians made no bones about their feelings that women were a separate category altogether.

Q: How did you fare with Syrian women?

SMYTHE: Very well. And there seemed to ... there were a great many Syrian women who were quite interesting and able people. There were not a great many professionals, but there were some. And when I was calling on the wives of the Cabinet Ministers, many of whom had relatively limited education in... in professional terms, I found them alert and lively, quite intelligent, and, very frequently, warm and human people. So it was ... it was extremely interesting to get to know them.

At the same time they didn't have the same aspirations as a whole that American women have and the idea of women's liberation, at that time, was not widely talked of in the United States. This way — oh, three or four years before “women's lib”, before there was enough momentum to make the kind of impact that it did in the following decade — it was just beginning to be recognized in the United States — we were aware of ... of the possibilities of chauvinistic attitudes. But it was really not until the '70s that many of us were thoroughly aware of the kinds of things that were happening around women.

So there wasn't a great deal of curiosity, and yet one Embassy wife told me that when news of our coming was publicized — something was said in Hugh's swearing-in

ceremony — George Ball, who was then Under Secretary of State, said they were getting two for the price of one, because they had a professional woman of some competence. And one of our Embassy wives and her husband talked about what it would be like to have a sort of “blue-stocking” woman with a Ph.D. coming in. And they sort of groaned inwardly about the possibilities, but, of course, when we met we became firm friends. We had a great deal in common. But their impression of what kind of person I was going to be was a bit overwhelming for some reason.

I think that may have ... that may have been an example of the attitudes towards professional women in those days. It's only fifteen or twenty years ago, but it just seems that we have crossed an awful lot of ground historically since then.

Q: Did you find any curiosity there about black Americans?

SMYTHE: A great deal. I think wherever we have gone there has been a kind of apprehension that there might be a kind of abrasive element in the subject of black Americans. My own personal style and Hugh's personal style were to be forthright and tell people how we saw things. But it was not necessary to beat them over the head with it and get accusatory at the same time. So that we found it possible to talk with people in matter-of-fact terms about things which were capable of arousing a great deal of emotion, of having great emotional impact.

We had our hands full with the Arab-Israeli kind of conflict so that color conflict was not uppermost. It may have been the time in our lives when we had less consciousness of it than any other time; simply because this was not of great importance to the Arabs. They were interested, but it was not something that they had concentrated upon. They were much more interested in the religious differences and in the political concerns. So in a way we were relieved of some of the burden of educating people about color during that period. I remember a number of conversations in which they simply did not seem to attach much importance to color.

Q: Are you saying that they were not very concerned about the racial problems which existed in the United States?

SMYTHE: They were... they were not as aware of it as people in other parts of the world, and there were Syrians of quite a wide variety of colors. There were some intermixtures. You know all kinds of Muslims went through the Middle East going to Mecca and what not. There were slaves, both Arab and African slaves, held by some of the Muslims. And an intermixture would thrust itself upon your consciousness now and then when we'd go through a village where there seemed to be darker people than in other places. But the importance of the religion was such that it seemed to take priority over the physical characteristics. Now any gross difference in physical characteristics probably would have been different.

We had relatively few blacks in and around the Embassy, and the ones we had were people who got along very well with the local inhabitants ... and as a result, again, the issue simply didn't come up very often.

Q: Did you find a number of Christians in Syria and Malta?

SMYTHE: As I recall, about thirteen percent of the population was Christian, and there were churches that operated right in Damascus. There had not been as much religious intolerance as one might think. And our Armenian housekeeper, who was a Christian, told me a very interesting story about religion. There was a Jewish trader who was not far from the Embassy residence, and at a time of great stress, the Government ordered Jews to remain in their homes. And I believe at that time they were forbidden to carry on business; this was before we arrived. Our housekeeper was telling me about it. She said there were a number of Arabs who came to her and said, “We are suppose to pay him so many pounds each month on our unpaid bill. Would you take the money to him?”

And so she would collect the money and make a note of who gave her how much and carry it to him each month. And people felt that it was their obligation to fulfill their obligation to him even though this was a time of religious crackdown, when Jews were not going to be allowed to go about their daily business. So there was a kind of fairness in this Arab population. around us that seemed to cast aside religious and political differences and, by extension, racial differences, and do what they saw was necessary according to their code, their moral code.

We saw a good many examples of Christians who did whatever they wanted to do and, of course, a great deal of the diplomatic corps was Christian. They went to churches and there were no problems at all. Once in a while we had some of the priests in the Eastern Orthodox Church over, along with other people, for social events or something else, some gatherings, if we were presenting a cultural affair; if we had musicians. For example, we had the Roger Wagner Chorale. And we would invite the orthodox priests as well as other people to attend, and sometimes they did. They were an element of the community that was important.

Now a good many of the Palestinians who worked for the Embassy were Christians. And once in a while we had to go to a funeral or a wedding or something affecting the employees or acquaintances who were associated with the churches. And there was never any problem with that. I did note, however, that our orphanage, about which I spoke, was not interested in having its children adopted by Christians, because these were Muslim children.. And one of the Fulbright professors suggested that he and his wife might be interested in adopting one of the children, and the Syrians indicated that they did not wish to have them adopted.

Q: Were there any black American Muslims who went to Syria while you were there?

SMYTHE: Not while I was there. I must say though, that there were some Jewish people who came to Syria while we were there. The first one was a rabbi who was visiting. He

was coming about his own business and he wanted to visit the Jewish cemetery. The Government was a little curious about that, but they didn't create any problem for him.

A second person was a personal acquaintance of ours who was on a trip and got to the Middle East, so he thought he'd come across from Lebanon and spend a few days with us and did. He had no problems.

The third one was Barbara Tuchman, the author, whose publisher sent her on a trip through the Middle East. She had just published The Proud Tower then, and she and her editor were on a visit that took her from Beirut to Damascus. Then she was going by road to Jordan and through the Mandelbaum Gate into Israel, and that she did.

And we knew others who came, other people who came. So it was not... it was not as intolerant a situation as some people imagined it would be, though there was great opposition to anything Israeli. And we would sometimes... when we first arrived, our news magazines were forwarded through the APO, no, through the international mail system and they would sometimes arrive with the name Israel inked out on the pages so that we could not have a document that gave information about Israel circulating. They called it Palestine, always.

After we got addresses corrected so that our mail came through the Embassy pouch, then we had no problems there. But on the Syrian newsstands, any American newspaper or magazine would be censored before it was turned loose, and sometimes whole pages would be missing.

Q: You spoke very fondly of your work: with the orphanage. Were there any other programs in which you took an active role?

SMYTHE: One of my ... one of my other activities would probably interest you from the standpoint of its traditional nature. We had a diplomatic women's sewing circle that met about once a month. We would gather up sewing machines, needles and thread and

materials and make little school dresses for poor children. And I remember going from one diplomatic home to another, and there'd be perhaps twelve or fifteen of us. The people with the machines would run up the side seams; the ones who had relatively little skill might simply attach ... would pin together things; and the ones with greater skill would sew them and so on. And we started out making layettes for babies. These were sent to hospitals, because many of the poorer Arab women were around at the hospital expecting a baby but with nothing to clothe the baby in, and they were given a little layette so they could dress the baby to take it home.

We solicited men's shirts, worn shirts, and when the collar was worn and they couldn't be used anymore, the rest of it made marvelous smocks for small children. We made many garments like that.

Then one day I was visiting a small town toward the south of Syria and went by the Catholic convent, where there were a number of poor children that we had been sewing for. And I was able to attend the first communion of a whole group of youngsters who were dressed in pink and white outfits that we had made for them. They were really quite attractive and the color was very nice. So we took pictures of these children and took them back to our sewing circle. That was one of the activities.

Another activity was simply learning about the culture, learning about the local arts and crafts. And one of the activities in which a number of people were engaged was collecting oriental rugs. There were several collectors. The Indian Ambassador collected about forty rugs while he was in Syria and probably has a very nearly priceless collection now. I was not deeply involved. I was learning first and then planning to collect later, and the Six-Day War interrupted that.

But it was fascinating to go into the souk, or market, and go through the, oh, perhaps ten or twelve miles of ... of covered streets where one could see everything under the sun being sold. There was a whole area that was for the artisans who made copper and

brass, and one could watch them at their work. There was another area that sold antiques, another that sold food, then modern clothing, and there was even an area where one got books, paper and ink and pencils and that sort of thin,.

The spice market was down the Street called Straight, where St. Paul went when he went through Damascus. And to go through places that had been traditional, that we had heard about for years and read about in the Bible, was quite an experience. There was a church which offered to tourists the window where St. Paul was let down in a basket to escape his enemies. And that obviously had been built long after the event; but it still brought back the old Biblical stories. So inevitably one got involved in antiquities, in history, and in archaeology.

One of the first outings I remember taking after I to Syria was to Resafa, to see a place where some of the events depicted in the Bible were said to have taken place. And to visit places that predated Christianity was a very rich experience.

One of the places I went to visit was a village, Maaloula, where they still spoke Aramaic, the language that Christ spoke. I believe it's the only place in the world where that language is still used. It was absolutely fascinating. When people came to visit us from the United States, it was one of my favorite places to take them for a visit. It took about an hour and a half or two hours to drive there, and then we would poke through the old ruins and see the caves where people had hidden away from their enemies. There was a place where sacrifices were made in pre-Christian days, human sacrifices, perhaps.

But it was an utterly fascinating land and a beautiful land. I found the beauty in the desert surprising. We who love to look at blue water and green trees and flowers can find another kind of beauty in the wide spaces with not a blade of grass in sight, but the rolling hills and the stark bareness of the land. Very lovely indeed. It was an interesting place to be.

I found less beautiful the southern area where lava rock, almost black in color, lay all across the land, where to till a field, a farmer needed to push the rocks off to one side and

very often had just small rock-strewn areas he could cultivate. But it would be green in the growing season. And these black rocks would remain there, reminding one that it was a fairly desolate place when the green things were not growing.

Syria had a prosperous farm economy. And the farm economy would keep the country afloat even if other things did not work out, if other things were going badly for them.

In going over the things that I've said, I've left out one thing, and that is the amount of help both of us have gotten from the support of other black people who applaud having recognition go to people that we believe in. Hugh got the cooperation of his peers because they respected him and they felt that he was honest in calling it the way he saw it and dealing with realities. And he didn't shirk something because it was difficult or painful. He felt that we needed to look at things as they were and cope with them or deal with them.

As a result, he had sterling support from fellow sociologists like Jim Moss and Hyland Lewis, from John Hope Franklin, from Kenneth Clark, from a whole spectrum of young people who had been his students and had admired him as a teacher and who applauded whatever he did. I think we can learn a lot from doing for each other, pushing each other's good points; making it possible to introduce other people to opportunities that seem suitable. He was always looking for jobs for people, looking for ways of using some black colleagues who deserved recognition, and I think that built both of us up. It built him up, but it also built other people around us up, so that together we could make some progress that we might otherwise not have been able to make. We sometimes have to allow for each other's handicaps and difficulties, but that kind of mutual support is the best antidote for prejudice that I know.

Having said this, I must not forget to mention one of the most influential people who became interested in him and believed in him was Mel Herskovits, who founded the first African Studies program in the United States. Hugh was the third Ph.D. to come out of that program , and Mel Herskovits was very proud of him and continued to be his friend

to the end of his life. I think we last saw Mel Herskovits at the International Congress of Africanists in Ghana, in 1962. If I remember correctly, he died within twelve months of that meeting.

Q: Ambassador Mabel Smythe, I want to thank you very much for sharing these recollections with us about your husband,

Ambassador Hugh Smythe. On a personal note, I'd like to say that Hugh was a very good friend to me. I can verify the fact that he was so supportive of people who were trying to continue their education. I benefited greatly from his encouragement, and I want to thank you both for being so involved with all of us.

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This is the second session of an interview with Ambassador Mabel M. Smythe as part of the Phelps-Stokes Fund's oral history project on former Black Chiefs of Mission. Ambassador Smythe was a United States Ambassador to Cameroon from May 1977 to February 1980. She is presently Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Africa. This interview is being conducted on June 3, 1981, at the State Department, Washington, DC.

Ambassador Smythe, what were the events which led to your entry into diplomatic service?

SMYTHE: I suppose one has to go back a long way to ... my involvement with international affairs when I was teaching in Japan.

My husband and I went to Japan in 1951 and spent two years there. I was teaching at Shiga University in Japan; he was teaching in Yamaguchi University. I got involved in encouraging one of my students to go to study in the United States. And from that, Hugh and I were both involved in doing this for colleagues and students, and in the course of that activity became increasingly involved in international affairs.

And later on, when John F. Kennedy was elected president and was interested in appointing some blacks to positions in the Government, a Democrat I knew spoke to me and asked for my curriculum vitae and asked what kind of appointment I might be interested in. I said I had had a long interest in educational exchange programs and would consider myself already involved in that, ready for it, and I shortly was appointed to the U.S. Advisory Commission on Educational Exchange.

That Commission was terminated a year later when the Fulbright-Hays Act was passed in 1962 and the U.S. Advisory Commission on International Education and Cultural Affairs took its place. And I was asked to join that Commission. That Commission was expanded and became quite active and I started a commitment to go overseas and do something with educational exchange each year as a member of that Commission.

In 1964, when it was necessary for President Johnson to appoint his first delegation to the UNESCO General Conference, which meets every two years, my name was on the delegation list, and I got my first experience in international meetings and international negotiations and found that extremely interesting. Some people I met, at that time, suggested that I ought to think in terms of a career in foreign affairs. They were thinking of, among other possibilities, a post at UNESCO.

But my husband's appointment to Syria came up in 1965; I took a two-year leave of absence and went with him. When he was posted to Malta, I went over in the summers to Malta and one thing led to another. And I became associated with the Phelps-Stokes Fund during a Republican Administration and the Foreign Service was no longer an immediate possibility.

Then in 1976, I was attending a conference in Washington, in suburban Washington, and I returned to my hotel one night and found there was a message asking me to return a call to Cyrus Vance, then Secretary of State. When I called, he came on the telephone at once and said, “Mrs. Smythe, how would you like to go as our Ambassador to Cameroon?”.. .

(laughs). And it honestly hadn't occurred to me before then. Cameroon was a country about which I had heard a great deal. It was one of the relatively few countries in Africa I had not visited. I had tried to visit it but airline schedules were difficult, and I didn't have to think very long before saying I would like it very much. So in due course, I went to Cameroon.

Q: What were your first impressions of Cameroon?

SMYTHE: My first impressions of Cameroon were that it was a pleasant place. For one thing one was struck by the temperature. Yaound#, the capital, has a very mild temperature, a really temperate climate that doesn't stray very far from 74 degrees mean temperature year round.

The second thing was that the people were friendly. They were not particularly curious about one, so that one didn't feel in the middle of a great deal of curiosity. People held their own council but were accessible, and I found them relatively easy to meet.

It was a friendly country that saw the United States as doing some things quite well, and the President had declared his interest in seeing closer commercial relations with the United States as well as good political relations. So when we had a message from the Department of State asking for our suggestions for making policy toward Africa the best it could be under the Carter Administration, I sent back a comment that one of the things that I'd like to see was constant consultation with African leaders as our friends, not waiting until there was a crisis and we needed to ask them a favor, but building up a kind of relationship all along that would survive problems and would help them feel that they knew us in depth, and vice-versa.

That became pretty much a part of our policy, not because I said it, but because many people believed the same thing. And our relations with Africa became, I believe, warmer

and more friendly during that period than they had been perhaps ever before. It was a gratifying time to be present.

I remember one of the early tests of that... that approach to relations with Africa, when the Horn of Africa became a hotter spot than it had been previously and there were border skirmishes between Ethiopia and Somalia. I went to call upon the President and talked to him about what we saw as the possibility of doing something about this enmity between two neighbors. He was discouraged at that point about the possibility of doing anything that would bring an early end to the hostilities, because the problem was so deeply rooted in the cultures of the people involved.

We must have talked for an hour about the possibilities: whether the OAU [Organization of African Unity] could speak with one voice and say to both, “We are determined that you ought to cease hostilities and find a way of settling your differences without going to war...”

Q: Excuse me, this conversation was with the President of Cameroon?

SMYTHE: ...the President of Cameroon.

Q: ...who was?

SMYTHE: Who was Ahmadou Ahidjo, then celebrating his twentieth anniversary as the leader of Cameroon, because he was a leader of Cameroon for two years before Cameroon became independent — leader of the larger part of what is now Cameroon.

President Ahidjo took very seriously the challenge of trying to work out a response to this, but he is also a realist and he was aware that one could not get the Organization of African Unity to speak with one voice on this, because each of the sides ... each of the two sides had its own adherents and these split the OAU.

We talked about the possible ways of doing a number of things but did not come up with a solution that satisfied us and we felt really would create a commitment to peace on the

part of all the parties. So we had to leave that conversation with future action to fellow. But in that one hour's conversation, I had an opportunity to get a sense of the man and to build up a great deal of confidence, first of all, in his judgment, in his sense of responsibility toward other areas of Africa beside his own, and his thorough commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Since then he has served on almost every good offices commission that the OAU has developed, so that I know that we are not alone in seeing him as a man who values peace and who would like to see a negotiated end to each dispute that takes place. He's a remarkable man and one of the most valuable memories I have is of the times I talked with him about events in Africa and indeed in the world in general.

Q: Your appointment came during the Administration of President Jimmy Carter.

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: Would you describe the attitude of his Administration toward foreign policy in Africa?

SMYTHE: There's no question in my mind but that the people in the Carter Administration accepted the idea that partnership would be the key to resolving issues with Africa. There was a great deal of emphasis placed on working with the African states, the leaders of those states, to devise elements of policy that would be agreeable to both sides and that would be understood by both sides. We knew that our interests would not always be parallel; that sometimes we would have to go one way and our African friends would have to go another. But we hoped that we would always be able to talk to each other about the reasons for our differences and to soften the effects of our having different needs at various times so that we could come back together and work cooperatively on issues where we would have an identity of interests. I think there was no question that there was this kind of commitment.

People who are deeply interested in Africa and who are emotional about Africa can sometimes complain of the Carter Administration, as they have about all Administrations, that they didn't go far enough toward the ideal. But no Administration can declare a foreign policy in a vacuum, and many times complaints that the Carter Administration did not go gar enough or did not, for example, forbid our business people to invest in South Africa, or take other such steps, failed to take into account that President Carter did not have the authority to issue an edict that would bring about that result and that it was politically impossible to get through Congress such a proposition.

It was very difficult for President Carter to keep the Congress from lifting sanctions on Rhodesia. And at the end, they were lifted a little too soon. But he had been able to stave off the worst that might have happened, which is the lifting of sanctions in the middle of negotiations on the independence of Zimbabwe. And sanctions did stay on long enough for that independence to be in sight when they were finally lifted.

I found during that period of time that concepts of how American Government works are frequently inaccurate, because people do not understand the nature of American Government and the system of checks and balances. It's only human to assume that things are ... things normally conform to our own personal experience.

lf, for example, someone in our society is seen as taking an... I'll give you an example. I went to see President Ahidjo shortly after the Senate of the United States had voted by a vote of ...51 to 42 I believe, to lift sanctions on Rhodesia. The House had upheld sanctions and the Senate voted to lift sanctions. And. when I walked in I said, “I suppose you have heard the news about our action on. sanctions?” He said, “Oh, yes, isn't it a pity your Senators voted to lift sanctions?” He said, “You haven't; your Government has lifted sanctions.” I said, “Oh no, Mr. President, our Government has not lifted sanctions. The Senate voted for lifting of sanctions, but the vote was so small it cannot override a

Presidential veto and the President is going to veto that measure if it gets past the House." "Oh," he says, "then sanctions have not been lifted." I said, "That is correct."

And he was much relieved. But in his view, if a powerful unit of Government says something, that is the Government. His is a centralized Government, and you don't have Parliament voting something that the President does not agree to uphold, so that this was a new experience for him.

Now there are very few people in African governments who have had sufficiently extensive experience in Washington and enough interest to have uncovered the subtleties of how we operate that way; so I saw as one of my important functions educating people to how American Government works. And it is so thoroughly different from their own that it is sometimes hard to grasp.

Another example, the kind of thing that needs attention. We cannot, as individuals, apply African experience ... measure African experience against our own backgrounds and come up with the right answer to how you do things there. But sometimes we can use our experience to advantage if we hold tight to the fact that we can't really judge by our own.

For example, I tended to see the difference between the parts of Cameroon that had been under French mandate and which therefore were formerly considered francophone, and the parts under British mandate, which were formerly anglophone. Now Cameroon is a united government now, with both English and French official languages, even given the fact that there are more people who grew up speaking French as a lingua franca. And remember, there are large numbers of Cameroonians who speak neither English nor French. But, taking into account that educated Cameroon children fall into two categories rather naturally — those for whom the French language is the first Western language, and those for whom English is the first Western language — there are naturally some tensions between the two. Because a good part of the English-speaking part of Cameroon voted to become part of Nigeria at independence.

This left a smaller English-speaking portion in Cameroon. And it is said that about four-fifths of Cameroon, or roughly four-fifths of Cameroon is originally francophone and the other fifth originally anglophone. The Cameroonians are making real attempts to teach both languages and encourage people to use both languages.

I saw some missed opportunities in getting the country to feel more truly bilingual, but the bilingual policy had made it possible to unify the country, at least officially. There were some anglophones who felt that the Federation was better: that to have a regional policy in which the anglophones pretty much ran their part of Cameroon gave the anglophones a larger share of power than simply having a proportional number of seats in the Legislature and a proportional number of people in the Government, and so on.

Well, one can argue this a great deal. But I saw a parallel between the minority that spoke English as a first language... first foreign-first Western language, and the minority black people in the United States. And I said to some Government officials with whom I had become pretty close friends — I had a group of Government officials and their wives who were primarily anglophones, to talk to on one occasion — and I said, “When we were trying to promote integration in the United States and to make the minority feel more a part of things, we went out of our way to publicize appointments for minority people to high-ranking Government jobs. We went out of our way to include minority people in all activities.” I said, “Since I have been in Cameroon, I have been asked to travel to Douala to dedicate a bridge, to travel to Ngaoundere to see a factory opened, to various sites to inaugurate new buildings. But I have never been invited to the English-speaking part of Cameroon to do one of these things. Why don't you make sure that people see the highest-ranking people in Government going to the anglophone side to inaugurate a new school or a public facility, or whatever?”

“Second, I would like to see publicity given to some of the things that you're already doing. You have appointed an English-speaking person as dean of the College of Letters and

Social Sciences. More should be said about that; he replaced a Francophone person. I think the English-speaking community would be very interested.

“And third, I have heard anglophone ministers give speeches in French. I have not heard a Francophone minister give a speech in English. I think it's important that those who lead the country give speeches in both languages, not just one language.”

So this kind of suggestion, informally talked about, may well have reached the highest levels of Government. Before I left, about a month before I left, there was a series of meetings in the anglophone west at which the President spoke. He spent four days in the anglophone section of the country going around to various parts of the country conducting meetings and speaking with the people.

And I was concerned about one other thing. I had not heard of their taking high-level visitors like chiefs of state or other interesting people to the anglophone part of the country. So I tried to see that people who came from the United States, particularly people who were not fluent in French, went to where they could talk with people without having to have a translator.

When Andrew Young came to Cameroon — he was still Ambassador to the U.N. at that time — we had a motorcade that went to Victoria, which is a prefectural capital in the Southwest, one of the capitals of the English-speaking part of the country, and Buea, which is the official capital of the southwest.

We took him there and the Governor and other people in the territory were deeply impressed and so appreciative of the opportunity to see him. They said, “Nothing like this has ever happened here!” The leaders began, I believe, to understand how useful this kind of public relations device can be.

When Patricia Derian, the Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights came, we chartered a small plane and took her to visit in the anglophone section of the country,

where she and I met with people in a fairly typical community. We visited the local coffee cooperative and saw the people processing coffee. We went to talk with the public ... with the delegate to the National Assembly, who had a feast in our honor, and women who came and danced and presented gifts to Secretary Derian.

And one of the highlights of our visit was a visit to the Fon, who is the local paramount chief. He wanted to show us the Afro-A-Kom, which is a piece of statuary that was spirited out of the country, sold to an art collector, brought to the United States, recognized as a missing piece of art that was traditional in its importance in Cameroon and returned to the country by Warren Robbins, director of the Museum of African Art.

They wanted us to see that piece of sculpture, but it was kept in a place sacred to men. So here was a dilemma: two women, the visiting Assistant Secretary of State and the American Ambassador, who would not be able to see it. So they put their heads together and our interpreter came back to us and. said, “The Chief has decided that you will be made honorary men in a ceremony.”

So they had a ceremony and transformed us into honorary men and we were taken into the sacred building where it was kept and allowed to see it and even photograph it, though the light was not good enough for the photographs to be very helpful. It was one of the interesting kinds of things that happened on our trip.

I think that the business of bringing together the anglophone and the francophone parts of the country involves so much. It involves not only language. There are some of the same cultural groups on both sides of the line, but there are some cultural groups that are found almost exclusively in the anglophone part of the country and some almost exclusively in the francophone part of the country. So it's going to take some understanding and commitment to bring about genuine unification of the two kinds of country.

Cameroon is trying to unify the laws and has a legal commission working on this, to develop a legal system that will draw upon the British Common Law and French

Napoleonic Code, but be truly Cameroonian. They have had the educational people working on promoting bilingualism and teaching the two languages in the schools. And all of the Cabinet ministers assured me that their children were learning both languages in school ... being able to ... and would be able to communicate.

I think to have a genuine bilingualism where people are equally comfortable in both languages, is probably too difficult to achieve for it to be attained very soon. But if people can get along in each other's languages, I think the point of unity will be well on its way, and it's important to reach that stage of development. But that's one of the remaining bits of unfinished business that the President is very well aware of.

Q: While you were in Cameroon, what role did you see black Americans taking in the shaping of foreign policy?

SMYTHE: We had a number of black Americans who were in the Embassy and in the AID mission. Their role was pretty much indistinguishable from that of other people, because the white Americans who served in Africa, particularly the younger generation that is coming up now... that has come up in the past fifteen years I'd say, perceives the importance of consultation, the importance of interaction. I might say that the older generation still needs guidance and help.

When I first arrived, I noted that several of the affairs that were given by officers in the Embassy would have very few Cameroonians in attendance. There would be a lot of diplomats from Europe and a lot of Americans, but they hadn't caught on to the fact that our representation funds, entertainment funds, were for getting to know the Cameroonians better. They were not for getting to know the Germans, the Swiss, or the French, and so on. So I sent a memorandum saying that we would not consider as reimbursable entertainment efforts which did not include a majority of Cameroonians. And affairs which were primarily for Americans or foreigners would not be considered representational affairs.

And my first affair to get acquainted at the Embassy was a reception at which I asked all members of the Embassy — Cameroonians as well as American — to bring their spouses and a Cameroonian friend. Each one was to come in with a Cameroonian; and if they did not know a Cameroonian to introduce to me, I had gotten a couple of volunteers to help introduce them to people that they might bring along. And this would help them to meet more Cameroonians. Well, that helped get things started and we had a good many Cameroonians who came. It was a very big party, because by the time we had put all the Embassy employees and wives down, we had about a hundred and sixty, a hundred and seventy people, counting all the agencies, including AID and the Marine Corps, and all the rest.

When we went on to add the Cameroonians, we had about two hundred and fifty people, and that got me started knowing people and got some people to knowing me. Some of them indicated that this was the first time they had been in the American Ambassador's Residence. So we were reaching into a category that we hadn't gotten to before.

And thereafter it was easier and I would sometimes have films. I would send invitations to see films in the Residence to people, anybody I thought could understand the English soundtracks or who was working on English.

Once in a while I had special showings for high-level Government employees who were studying English and who might like to be part of a smaller group. We would be able to get video tape recordings that would not be suitable for very large groups, and it worked out very well. A number of people who were not really fluent in speaking English would come and watch the films. Incidentally, among the people who would come and watch the films occasionally were the Soviet and Chinese Ambassadors, neither of whom spoke English... (laughs). The Chinese knew a little English, but he didn't use it very often, though he tried sometimes.

The possibility of reaching more people requires a multi-pronged effort. Some people who would come to diplomatic receptions in the evening were not accustomed to coming to sports events during the afternoon. Once in a while we'd have a sports day and invite people over in the middle of the day to come and play tennis or swim or play croquet on the lawn, or whatever. And several times we had people in for games; and some people who liked that would not have been so interested in the other — in the films, for example, or in other kinds of things. But with sports events, you can accommodate people who don't speak the same language. A tennis game is a tennis game. And that gave us a certain amount of flexibility in how we operated.

I sometimes found it possible, too, to stop by and call on people. For instance, I had been in Cameroon only three or four months when I was out one sunny afternoon and heard that there had been a terrible auto accident. One of our Embassy drivers had witnessed it. The son of a Minister of State had been killed. He was only sixteen; he was riding his motor bike and he ran head-on into a bus and was killed.

I happened to have some white roses blooming in my garden, so I sent them over with a note of condolence and then went to the funeral, which was attended by all the Government functionaries. I found that I was the only diplomat in attendance. But the Minister seemed to appreciate the fact that, as a neighbor — I lived two blocks from him — I had called upon him and then gotten acquainted with him. My own recent experience with death in the family made me feel quite sympathetic to what it must mean to him to lose his only son at that age. So in spite of his being ideologically one of the more leftist members of the Administration, he always seemed to count me as something of a friend, and we never had any personal difficulties. Once in a while when there was an occasion for him to deal with ... be part of discussions on United States policy, he would listen as a courtesy to me anyway. And I always thought of the friendly regard that one might have is worth pursuing even though we may not have happy occasions on which to establish it. You just never know when you may need the rapport that is established with people.

Q: What were your perceptions of black Americans back home, their involvement in the shaping of foreign policy?

SMYTHE: Back home? Ah, I see what you're saying. Before I answer that, let me say one thing that I forgot to mention.

We had a great many black Americans of prominence who came through, and I tried to make it possible for them to get the widest possible exposure that they could have. Our intercultural exchange programs also had a good many black Americans coming through: black American performers or speakers. So I always tried to see that as many people as possible would be exposed to them. And this, I think, gave the Cameroonians a healthy respect for the calibre of black Americans that were available, and a great many black Americans had a healthy respect for the Cameroonians that they were able to meet.

We were not very much directly affected by black American input in foreign policy, because more of the efforts of our Americans here were directed toward independence for Zimbabwe or policy toward South Africa. Cameroon was very much concerned about South Africa, and the feeling that black Americans agreed with Cameroonian policy toward South Africa was, of course, a plus.

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Q: Today is June 3, 1981.

SMYTHE: One of the areas in which black Americans had an interest in Cameroon was in the promotion of business relations and investment. A number of black business people came through Cameroon. Some came with Andrew Young; some came separately. His brother, Dr. Walter Young of Atlanta, came to Cameroon twice while I was there. Jake Henderson, Jr., who was working with a group of private investors who were interested

in developing business in Africa, and representatives of his firm were there several times. And my cousin, Eugene Dibble, came over several times.

The Minister of Economy and Planning was very gracious to persons who came over. At the same time, I think that Cameroon recognized that larger firms had a great deal more economic power to dispense, but at the same time they welcomed smaller firms which would be able to invest and which might have qualified people to help set up new business in Cameroon.

One of the things I tried to do was to visit places that were producing goods and services in Cameroon. In Yaound#, for example, there was a press that published books ... books that were used not only in the university, but also for the general reader. There was a sugar Factory about two hours away from Yaound#. I visited the wood pulp factory and the aluminum foundry in Edea, and a tannery in the central part of the country, a couple of textile mills and rice polishing plant in the northern part of the country. So they had a number of things which were already going but plenty of opportunity for other kinds of developments.

During my tenure there, one thing came to fruition. Chase Bank, Cameroon opened. That was something which had been in the works before I arrived, and there were some companies which came while I was there and which continued to work on projects. And since I have returned, I have been in touch with some that are going back to follow up on earlier contacts. It's obvious that for economic relations to develop, it takes time. They don't get set in one visit. It takes time to cultivate confidence in each other, a feeling of knowing what the opportunities are and assessing them and deciding what is likely to work and what will not. I. still retain a commitment to encourage people to look at Cameroon, invest in it, and do business there if they find that it works out for their plans with their company.

I understand that there is a black company that is going to have a representative in Cameroon who'll be able to answer questions from business people back here who are interested in setting up something special. And the National Business League through ...what is the name? ...they have a foundation, and I can't remember what they call it. It's named after a black hero like Frederick Douglass. Booker Washington Foundation, that's it. The Booker Washington Foundation has had representatives in Cameroon who have been working with our AID program to develop possibilities for private black investment in Cameroon.

Q: Andrew Young, the black American, was the U.S. Ambassador to the UN during your time ... yes. He was a controversial figure in America, particularly among white Americans, but it was felt that he was very instrumental in improving relations between America and Africa. What were Cameroonian impressions of Andrew Young?

SMYTHE: When you bring that up, memories come crowding back. And perhaps the most poignant one was our arrival at the Atlantic Beach Hotel in Victoria, Cameroon. and finding a paraplegic sitting at the entrance, waiting to see Andrew Young, about whom he had heard for such a long time, and handing him a raffia handbag on which was woven, WELCOME ANDREW YOUNG.

We went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where a room had been set up for an exchange of civilities between two members of the Cabinet and Ambassador Young, with his delegation in attendance. A number of government people who were concerned with international trade and international relations were also present. After Andrew Young had spoken, he left that gathering. There were to be some other speeches after he had spoken and the Ministers had responded. He and I left the gathering so he could dedicate the new building to be used by the U.S. International Communications Agency in cultural relations with Cameroon.

As we went outside, I saw that the entire grounds around the Foreign Ministry were filled with people from the government offices who had come down just to get a glimpse of him. And being the kind of person he is, he insisted on going over to shake hands with a few people. Well, the group closed in on him and the security people were worried because there were so many people around. I went and got into my car — I felt that that enthusiastic crowd was not a place for me — and he shook hands and people greeted him so warmly. Then on our way through the streets, when they saw who was coming, they would stop and shout and wave and always he would gather crowds. There was such a reception for him!

The Ministry of Economy and Planning presented him with a Cameroonian robe and cap of the kind that the Minister himself wore when we were having a reception for him at the Embassy residence. He went upstairs and put it on, then came back. I had a picture of him in that robe up on that cabinet. It's in this box now...(slight laughter), expressing his appreciation directly and at the same time expressing his identification with the people of Cameroon.

We had more members of the Cabinet to call at the residence that night than ever before, because everybody wanted to see him and talk with him. He also had a way of expressing what he felt very directly. He would explain how he felt about things so that people knew it was honest, unvarnished truth. But it was never ugly or abrasive. He has a natural warmth toward people.

And I remember one member of the delegation had left his suitcase behind and didn't have a change of underwear, he went downtown to buy some undershorts and they cost approximately twenty-five dollars in American money for two pairs of undershorts. In his speech before the assembled people concerned with business in Cameroon, Andrew Young said, “Now if we were doing business with you in Cameroon, you wouldn't have to pay that kind of price for underwear. We would see to it that you got a better deal in prices and would be able to sell at a much lower price.” And the way in which he did it was done

with warmth and humor and it got a good warm laugh. Since that time a number of people have remembered that incident and have talked about the possibility of solving some of the economic problems in terms of prices by using American suppliers.

Q: Would you describe the political climate in Cameroon when you were there?

SMYTHE: Cameroon was a stable political country in terms of... there were occasional realignments of the Cabinet, one in particular in November of 1979, when some people were retired or moved from one position to another. Some appointees were brought in for the first time; always the balance of anglophone and francophones was being maintained. The President is a key figure in the Administration. Not very much happens of any importance that doesn't involve the President's approval. He doesn't have to approve every jot and title of what is done, but any policy matters ultimately come from him or from his very trusted advisors. The President does not have a kind of cult of personality. He's not a charismatic figure, but he has a kind of wisdom that comes from experience and enables him to get disparate people to work together. It's astonishing sometimes to see how he co-opts people and gets enemies to work on his team, and work constructively. I was fascinated by that.

A second thing is his sensitivity to nuances. When I first arrived, I had a message for him and it was addressed to Al Hadj Ahmadou Ahidjo, which uses the title due a Muslim who has been to Mecca. I was told that Al Hadj was not to be used because it was a religious title, and he felt that as representative of all the people, some of whom were not Muslim, he should not use a Muslim title. In private circles which were restricted to Muslims, fine; but as a Chief of State he was simply President Ahmadou Ahidjo .

I found that an illuminating aspect of, of how he felt. I also got the impression that he was able to listen and to learn as well as to tell how he felt about things. He had to be able to listen and learn or he would not have lasted so many years. I got the impression that he would like to begin thinking of retiring even though he was still in his fifties, but that a

good many people in the country feel that it is difficult to replace him with someone whose ability to make judgments has been proven. I talked with some members of his team, who believe that the Prime Minister, who is officially his successor if anything should happen to him, they believe that he would be a person who would quickly gather up the kind of following and the kind of loyalty that he would need to be effective.

The attempt of President Ahidjo to institutionalize what is happening in Cameroon has probably been sufficiently successful so that things would go on much as they already have if he were to leave.

Now from an American point of view, there are Americans who feel that the system is a closed system. When you go to vote, you're given one slate of names; there is not democracy as we know it. I agree with that. I think it's certainly not as we know it. But after I looked into their procedures through what happened with one friend of mine who was nominated and elected to Parliament, I decided that Cameroon may have about as effective a democracy as we do. Not everybody agrees.

There is a tight central system, a great deal of concern for security. But when my friend was asked to stand for Parliament, he had to go back to his home district, spend some time there, talk with the local people, and be approved by the local council as someone who did understand the people and their problems and could represent them. He had to be approved by not just the village council but a district committee that had to see how he fitted in with their district aims and objectives. There was a committee that had to examine his record and see whether he was of the moral character that they wanted, whether there was any objectionable feature in his background. There was a group that dealt with his competence to exercise the kind of judgment that would be needed, and he had, oh, seven or eight levels of committees and groups that had to approve of his qualifications.

So I began thinking: Are our elections as thoughtful as that? Once in a while we have people who manage to get through elections who are not so democratically elected, and

in Cameroon there is insistence by the Government that people vote. They consider it very important to have most of the voters turn out. And most of the voters vote for their candidate, because if they don't get a big turnout, or if they have too many ballots that are not for the candidate, then something is wrong.

So I have revised my impressions as to how democracy might be carried out in a system, a traditional culture in which there has been a good deal of negotiation. And I do know that they work from eighteen thousand candidates down to four thousand between the initiation of the process and the final vote. So there's a good deal of room there.

If there are too many people who believe something that the Government does not believe, the Government finds a way of accommodating some of that policy so that it will bring the dissidents into the picture again, keep them as part of what is going on.

There was an incident at the university. The students went on strike and protested a ruling by the university administration. Law students had been taking three years to get their degrees, and it was decided by the administration that they were not able to cover all the material they should; henceforth, they should take four years to get a degree. The students felt that if they took four years to get a degree, they should get something different from the degree given to the people who had studied only for three years. And the university administration turned them down. The Ministry of Education, which supervises the university and all the rest, or perhaps a representative of the Minister, went out to the campus, talked with people, considered all the evidence and decided that the students had a point: that it would be sensible to give a different degree after four years of study. So that was decided and that was the end of the problem. So a problem does not have to be resolved by changing the Government; it can be resolved within the Government, and that is the claim of the Ahidjo people.

I said one day, “When are you going to have more than one political party?” They said, “We are going to have more than one political party, but you should have seen us when

we had twenty-eight political parties — almost all of them tribally-oriented without a commitment to the whole of Cameroon. That didn't work. So we can't have parties until they can be inter-tribal and really deal with issues that are very broad. Just having tribal groups doesn't work." I accept that as a rational point of view that makes some sense.

Q: As a female Chief of Mission, how were you received in a strongly Muslim country such as Cameroon?

SMYTHE: I think, well, Cameroon is not a "strongly Muslim" country. Perhaps a third of the people are Muslims, and the Chief of State and several members of the Cabinet are Muslims. It's said that about a third of the people are Christians and another third are animists. My experience was that this was accurate. But I think one has to say that African Muslims, black African Muslims, are not the same as Middle Eastern Muslims, and they do not have the same attitude toward women.

President Ahidjo said in our first conversation: "We have a great many able women in Cameroon. You will be ..." he did not use the words 'role model', but I think it was what he intended, "you will be a role model for people, because we are encouraging our women to take positions of importance." And indeed they were.

The first month or so after I had presented my credentials, I had a reception for a group of women who were attending an international conference in Cameroon. And the Cameroonians I invited included the first woman, an MD, to teach at the medical school; a woman magistrate; the senior woman member of Parliament. And within a year, President Ahidjo and his Government had seen to it that ten percent of the members of the National Legislature were women. That is a better record than we have in the United States. They had twelve out of 120. I had a special luncheon for them and invited them to meet some visiting American women, one of whom had been president of the League of Women Voters, and they found it exceedingly interesting.

There were increasingly women in positions of authority and some of them were extraordinarily poised and able. There were two people, women, in Cabinet positions. The Minister for Social Welfare and the Vice-Minister of Education were both highly trained and able women. It took perhaps two years before another woman ambassador came. And then the woman who represented India in Lagos was given the responsibility of representing her country also in Cameroon, and she came over to present her credentials. She was not resident there, but that made two of us who were on diplomatic rolls, the first two, I might say, that Cameroon had received.

I found a great deal of interest in having me interact with the women of Cameroon, but at the same time I was aware that it was still a novelty. It was still “we point with pride to this woman or that woman,” and there were still a good many reservations about full equality for women. But at diplomatic affairs, the diplomatic women and the Cameroonians certainly understood that when they tended to have the women sitting together and the men sitting together, my duties involved my sitting with the men and talking politics, not staying out of the conversation, because one does pick up useful information at diplomatic affairs. And they simply accepted this as part of my function there, and I didn't perceive any sense of rejection, or rejection of the idea, or resentment against my being part of the male circle as a result of this.

Q: What was your relationship with the diplomatic corps?

SMYTHE: With the diplomatic corps, which was a small one, relationships were really quite personal and easy and so on. Again, they accepted the fact that I would not necessarily remain with women while men talked business. I tried to mix it up and do both things. I tried not to seem to try to get away from the women all the time, and sometimes I said, “Well, girls, I have to go back to work,” and move to join the men that way. But I tried to take with me one or two of my male colleagues when we were sitting down talking with the women and so on. Very often they went along with this. If we were in an Oriental or an

African home, it was much more difficult to do. In the home of a European ambassador, it was much easier because the Europeans tended to mix it up more naturally.

Q: As a woman of color representing the United States, did you find any advantages or disadvantages to this?

SMYTHE: There was, I understand — this is not for publication yet — I understand that the Cameroon Government was a little suspicious of my civil rights background. They were afraid that black Americans were so aggressive about civil rights that a person of this background would be critical of what they were doing in civil rights in Cameroon. And I heard indirectly that they wondered why I couldn't be sent somewhere else. But once I was accepted there, once I arrived there, I didn't see any sense of resentment or concern and we could talk openly about my views of this and that kind of procedure. And I was interested in talking with the Minister of Justice, for example, about how they managed to reconcile the various systems of law that they had. In addition to the British and the French, there was also a traditional kind of law, and there was the Islamic law, religious law in Islamic places. And one Islamic ruler, the Sultan of Foumban, told me, “Sometimes I have to take one hat off and put on another.” He says: “True, I am a Muslim ruler, but I am also the modern Mayor of this city and I have to uphold the laws which have been passed by the Government of Cameroon. So I have to remove my Muslim hat and put on the hat of the Mayor of the city.” And that kind of awareness of what is involved seemed to be widespread and officials were certainly aware of the variety of sources of law in existence.

In terms of other possibilities that black Americans have, Africans very often forget about our racial roots because they haven't had the same kind of experience, and have a majority government which really has no white settlers. There are few whites who live in Cameroon, but they are mostly perceived as transients who will be there for a while and then will go on back to France or wherever they came from; because of this, there was not a great deal of identification of whites with Cameroon society. They saw us as culturally like whites, rather than like Africans.

The issue of American racial experiences came into focus when we showed the film “Roots.” We had the entire series of “Roots” to show to Cameroonians in various ways. Some sessions were held in my residence. When the program was first introduced, we had discussed how best to use it, how best to help people understand it. A lot of Cameroonians had different views, different values from the black American values. We saw this as an affirmation of our roots. They saw it in quite different terms and one of them said, “Why is it you are glorifying the past when we are trying to get away from it? We want to modernize; we don't want to return back to the past which first of all wasn't as idyllic as it's depicted there; it was a time of economic deprivation, of great hardship from time to time,” and so on.

And we had a very interesting discussion of the differences between having your roots all around you, accepted and verified and acknowledged, and having roots which were relatively unknown, not accepted, not really thought through. And they began to see how we were searching in ways that they would never have to search for their own roots or their own backgrounds.

We also talked about racism and, fortunately, the story of “Roots” depicts both whites who identified with blacks in their struggle for a better life and whites who made it difficult for them and who rejected blackness as something evil and foreign and different. Our having panel discussions after certain segments of the program was important to help people view what was involved. Our USICA people showed this to the Cameroonian employees, and some of the Cameroonian employees said, “We can understand this and take this, but we think maybe-you shouldn't show it to Cameroonians in general. They wouldn't understand. They will think Americans are terribly hateful people, because they'll identify Americans as slave owners and people who are willing to flog and maim people, and so on.” It was a very interesting kind of experience.

Before “Roots” came, we published a little booklet that summarized what it was about. I wrote an introduction to the booklet, in which I tried to set “Roots” in the context of its

universal human appeal, and explain why it had an appeal to Americans who were not slaves, who were not poor and who were not black. The interchange and the opportunity to discuss it were very important. People's perceptions of what life in the United States was like, and what race meant in the United States underwent a good deal of change in the process of seeing all of this and discussing it. We had some very interesting reactions from people who had been to the United States and people who had not been to the US, as well as participation by Americans, some of whom were permanent residents of Cameroon and married to Cameroonians.

Q: While you were Ambassador to Cameroon, you were also mandated to serve the United States Government in Equatorial Guinea. Would you talk about some of your experiences there?

SMYTHE: First a bit of background. Equatorial Guinea had been for eleven years, I believe, under the control of a man who had progressively seemed to lose touch with reality. He is given credit for virtually destroying the economy of the country. Equatorial Guinea was one of the jewels of Africa. It had coffee and cocoa production that was unusually high, and it had a surplus of foreign exchange. It also had one of the highest educational levels and the highest average personal income in all Africa. It also had the best health system of any, country in Africa.

When Macias Nguema, who was the President of the country, broke with the Spanish, he progressively removed the Spanish schools, Spanish hospitals, Spanish influence and replaced these things with socialist input. The Russians took over the fishing industry. They had a contract by which they were to take all the fish and share a portion of it with the local community, 25% of the catch, I believe. The local people complained that they gave the Equatorial Guineans the trash fish and kept the first-class fish for themselves and removed it from the country. The Chinese came in, the Cubans came in. Equatorial Guinea was a staging base for sending Cubans to Angola, for example.

In August of 1979, a coup took place and Macias Nguema was dethroned and was removed from office. And a cousin of his who had been a member of the Cabinet but who became estranged when the President executed his brother, succeeded as president. Now the new president, President Obiang, came into power in August. He declared that Equatorial Guinea wished to be friendly to any country that came as a friendly power. He wanted to establish relations with the United States. He welcomed the Spanish back: Equatorial Guinea had been a Spanish colony. The Spanish came back. They put money into the country so that... I understand that the civil servants had not been paid in six months. So it was possible for them to pay off the arrears of the civil service and get things going again.

But they had no postal system; no banking system; there was no place where you could officially exchange money when you came into the country. There was no real public transport system; there was no communication between the mainland and the island which had contained the capital of Malabo, because the regular public transport had been discontinued. Once in a while there would be a plane that would come over, but there wasn't regular service.

Well, President Obiang began to change this and tried to rebuild. And the Spanish, who are our allies in NATO and with whom we have a cordial relationship, asked us to come in and stand with them to support rehabilitation of the country. So after a great deal of discussion, we agreed that we would certify an ambassador there, and I would be the Ambassador. We had from the beginning of Equatorial Guinea's independence had the Ambassador resident in Yaound#, but the government of Macias had declared persona non grata my predecessor and his deputy. As a result, we had not bothered to reestablish relations and certify someone else.

Well, when it was decided that I would go over and present my credentials, I went over in December of 1979 — although before that we had sent in my deputy, who spoke Spanish — he went over several times to assess the situation and make reports to Washington,

and a team of people went to Equatorial Guinea to see what was needed, whether there was disaster of a magnitude that required immediate concern. They did determine that the people needed food and medicine so that the hospitals and dispensaries could begin functioning again. We even sent a Peace Corps representative to look into the possibility that Peace Corps service might be appropriate.

We were not given a budget in our Embassy for any of the work in Equatorial Guinea. We simply had to use our local transport budget to finance these trips to Equatorial Guinea, because it was a time of great budget stringency. But somehow we managed, because we felt it was important for us to respond to a country which had, in accordance with our professed ideals, changed in several ways. It had broken with the Soviets and Cubans and turned the country around, holding an open door to all friendly powers. It was trying to establish its record in human rights; and they invited the International Commission of Jurists to attend and observe the trial of Macias for the murders of many of his people and so on, and see how they were conducting themselves. On the human rights basis, on the East-West basis, and simply on the basis of humanitarian concern for a country which was on its knees, we needed to respond.

People were not getting the kind of medical care they needed; lepers had not been treated for several years; there was an epidemic of measles, which is a very serious disease in Africa. There were other health hazards; and there was no functioning electrical system in any town in the country; there was no functioning educational system throughout the country, and so on. So our team decided that there was a need for immediate assistance in the health sphere, and we had a ton of medical supplies flown to Equatorial Guinea and delivered even before I presented my credentials.

When I went to Equatorial Guinea — it was by that time December of 1979, since my presentation of credentials had had to wait while I was away in the United States — and I returned by way of Madrid so as to talk with the Spanish Government about ways in which we could cooperate to set up a system for Equatorial Guinea. By the time all that

was done, it was December. I presented my credentials and at the same time had to explain to the President that I was being asked to return as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and therefore would not be able to serve very long. However, we believed it was important to establish the fact that we were recognizing Equatorial Guinea by accrediting an ambassador, and that we did expect to be working with them in the future, and with the Spanish Government, toward the rehabilitation of the country.

The response to that was a positive one. President Obiang said, “Since you are going back to the United States, you can tell our story. You can tell our story better if you have seen our country, so I want you to come back and make a tour.” So on my next trip, I went back and traveled around the island and visited a cocoa plantation which was working at a fraction of its capacity. I flew to the mainland and traveled all around to see the state of affairs in the rural areas and the local markets. I visited schools; I visited local government and even stayed overnight at an army post out in the middle of the country. I saw the conditions of the roads, and I saw how at the border, just across the border in Cameroon, there were goods for display that I had not seen in any of the markets in Equatorial Guinea. And some of the people from Equatorial Guinea would go across the border and buy or barter what they could from these local markets.

So it was a useful opportunity for me. After I came back, I was able to see the Vice President and Foreign Minister of Equatorial Guinea. when he visited the United Nations and welcomed him to my country as he had welcomed me to his. Now what's the national interest in Equatorial Guinea? We can live without Equatorial Guinea, and obviously did, because they were not producing anything we had to have at the time they declared my predecessor persona non grata. But we do have an interest in seeing a democratic government rise there. We do have an interest in seeing that people have a government which makes it possible for them to live decently and to feel that they have a future. And we do have an interest in supporting our Spanish allies, who are active and concerned. That is their only African affiliate. That was once a Spanish colony. And we have very good relations with Spain and have air force and naval facilities there. So we had many reasons

for feeling cooperative about redeveloping Equatorial Guinea. We are now planning to open an Embassy there, and while we may not have an ambassador at once, we will have someone, a charg#, there until we can get an ambassador accredited and resident.

So this is a story with a happy ending. The end is not in sight, because there is a great deal of hard work before Equatorial Guinea gets on its feet again. But the potential for good agricultural production is there, and I hope it will once again be a prosperous community.

Q: Can you just tell me briefly some of the things which you might have wanted to do but were unable to do while you were in Cameroon?

SMYTHE: What are my frustrations?

Q: Yes.

SMYTHE: Cameroon provided one with enough to do so that there was never a feeling of empty-handedness. There was always something that needed to be followed up and that could be followed up. I had a special feeling for the expansion of the university. Before I was named to Cameroon, I heard that the university was sending a delegation to the United States and wanted our cooperation at the Phelps-Stokes Fund. After I had been named, the Ambassador spoke to me about this issue and said that the delegation that had been planned for early 1977 was not coming in '77 but would be coming in '78. He wanted my cooperation.

When 1978 came about, I was able to come to the United States and accompany that delegation through some of its visits, not all, but some of its visits to universities and foundations and government agencies, and to be a part of the discussions on what the United States might do to help with the development of the university. Now AID projects, and this was an AID project, require a great deal of time, and I had to leave Cameroon before we could provide enough money for us to put into action the proposals that had

been accepted by AID. Again, at a time of budget stringency, you have to decide what to do first. And since the university expansion program had not yet begun, we postponed it a year, in order to eke out our money and make our money go farther. But this year we would have implemented that program. I would like to have been part of that. And I am acutely aware that since the discussion, since the time when I visited with the delegation that came from Cameroon to visit the United States, the chancellor of the university has changed; the Director of Higher Education and the Minister of Education have changed. I have been succeeded by another ambassador. The AID mission in Cameroon has changed in its leadership. And I am not sure how many people who are now, associated with that project have the institutional memory of how it started, what it involved and what agreements we had as to how we were going to go about it.

It is not very often that a university which has been part of the francophone university family approaches the United States for help for its development. I saw this as an opportunity to help the university develop toward some very important and practical ends that could be served. They wanted to develop an agricultural school, a business center and technological center. All of these would be areas in which the United States could be very helpful. I believe that it will come about, but I am not sure that it will come about without losing sight of some of the objectives that we had in mind when we started.

So that's perhaps the first frustration I would say that I had, and, of course, there's always the frustration of leaving a number of friends, of leaving a kind of active ongoing program in which one has a part. I miss seeing what is being done there and participating in it. But I have confidence in my successor, whom I got to know before he went over, and in a number of people on his staff, who are likely to carry on the tradition of the Foreign Service in ways that will be very important. And I have heard some items about how my successor is operating that indicate his interest in the human touches that are important as well as the day-to-day obligations of an ambassador that have to be carried out, so I think Cameroon will be all right, and the United States program will be all right.

Q: What direction would you like to see American foreign policy take in Cameroon and in the rest of Africa?

SMYTHE: I would like to see the kind of feeling of warm personal relations built up. I think it is important for us and for Africa that we view our relations with Africa as close and mutually satisfying. I think there is a feeling on the part of the new Assistant Secretary designate for African Affairs that this should be so. Personalities change in ways in which people do these things. They change. But I think the feeling that we have a sterling asset in the interest that black Americans have shown in African affairs, as well as in other affairs — I wouldn't for a moment restrict black American input to areas that are related to Africa or even other parts of the diaspora. It seems to me that we have such a special relationship available to us there that Africans respond to, and as a result, it is important for them to see a George Dalley or an Anne Holloway or a Mabel Smythe explaining American foreign policy. And I hope there will continue to be abundant input from black diplomats as we go about our business overseas.

I would like to see a continuation of the point that I made earlier: that we work very closely together so automatically that we don't have to look around for a way and means of communicating when we are in a crisis and need to discuss things with our African counterparts. I'd like for the relationship to be so continuous and ongoing that it's simply natural to look to each other for cooperative action when anything happens that requires it. I also want people... You know, having grown up in an ambiance that looked toward equality and integration and so on, I am acutely aware of the importance of seeing blacks as part of the total body politic, not a little corner that is special all the time. I want to see us involved in all foreign policy. I want to see us take our place and make contributions where we can.

I hope one of the things we do is keep a great many black Americans attracted to the Foreign Service or get a great many attracted. We still do not have the number we need, but our affirmative action programs had begun to remedy problems at the lowest levels by

taking... Each new class has a number of blacks in it. Now given attrition, given the fact that we haven't had a long history of getting into the Foreign Service, we need to continue that for another decade before we can say, all right, we have people all the way through our foreign policy professional ranks. We're going to need to continue to have a good many black appointees, disproportionately more perhaps, simply because there are not enough blacks already in the system at the upper levels to supply a fair share of the top positions.

I would like to see our country have the advantage of that, because it really does make a difference when outsiders know someone who has been involved in the movement toward civil rights in the United States and know that that person understands and represents American foreign policy. That gives a kind of credibility to the foreign policy in the eyes of those who see themselves as taking a similar role internationally in having to work into a position of greater influence.

I hope that we will continue to work very closely with African organized opinion such as the OAU, the Organization. of African Unity, so that we naturally turn to them, and defer to them, in their area of the world just as we'd expect them to defer to us when it comes to the Western hemisphere and our concerns here.

Q: Ambassador Smythe, you're getting ready to leave the State Department in two days. What instructions would you give to black Americans about becoming more involved in the shaping of American foreign policy?

SMYTHE: I'd like to say two things: One of them is, keep coming; keep being involved; keep making sure that people understand our concern for foreign policy and our intention to be a part of it. But the second thing I'd like to say is that there are many ways to accomplish one's objectives. We have seen a good deal of confrontational approach ... of the confrontation approach to getting what one wishes to have. That is only one of many approaches. I would like for the institutions and organizations which are working for

foreign policy to have a whole quiver of arrows, not just confrontation. I'd like also to have cooperative relations, ways in which people with the ... those who are in power to influence foreign policy as well as attack some of them when they do what is wrong in our eyes.

But I don't think one can pick out just one strategy and go with that. I think we have to have a much more comprehensive way of approaching foreign policy. And when we feel strongly, I would like to see us work very hard to understand what is the point of view of the people who are making policy. Why do we feel that way? Where does the power lie? To what extent can we persuade people to act in ways that we see as fitting our personal interests and our collective interests?

We're still not very sophisticated in the way we approach foreign policy. We tend to take doctrinaire positions and to have people either right or wrong, almost. I think that sufficed when we were at the very early stages of sophistication. Now we should be shrewd enough to look into the subtleties of positions we are taking and try to work out positions that will be realistically achievable, positions that can be defended on logical grounds, on all sorts of rational grounds, and positions which provide a variety of approaches. I think that to wed ourselves to one approach or ... and one policy and one strategy is to use less than all the tools that we have to work with. I'd like to see us become much broader and much shrewder in the way we press our ... our recommendations on the Government. When we become better able to defend our positions, better able to understand all the political influences that must be taken into account, I suspect we will be better able to achieve our own aims. I'd like to see us move toward that.

Q: This interview would be incomplete without our having some further details on your background, your personal life, your professional history. Would you just talk about that a bit?

SMYTHE: I suppose one of the things that has been important in my background is the expectation of my parents and other relatives and members of the family, extended family,

that we would make something of ourselves. Achievement was extolled from the earliest times, and both of my parents were extremely active in community affairs. Both of them had a capacity for independent thinking and leadership, so that there was a tendency to grow up expecting to accomplish something and initiate something on our own. Because my father went to school in New England, he had a healthy respect for New England education, and it's probably most of that that lies behind the fact that I struggled to get to a New England college even though I couldn't get there until my senior year. And then I had to struggle to be allowed to graduate in one year, but I had taken some extra courses and that enabled them to feel that I had a cushion for my academic background, and it was possible to complete my work after four years.

I think, also, having grown up in a university community, lived in a university community — I was born in Montgomery, Alabama, where my father was on the faculty of Alabama State College; I was born across the street from the campus. My father took a position at the Standard Life Insurance Company and left the teaching profession when we moved to Atlanta. But I was still one block from Spelman College, one block from Morehouse and, ultimately, after I grew up, our house was across the street from Clark University, because Clark moved into the vicinity.

So I grew up surrounded by higher education, and most of my parents' associates were concerned with the institutions of higher education in Atlanta. Mother was the president of the Atlanta University Alumni Association for something like twenty-two years, so we had a great deal of discussion of her love for Atlanta University around the dinner table. My father was a graduate of the University of Wisconsin and back in my childhood days, all the Wisconsin alumni in Atlanta were white, and he was not part of their activities. But as integration took place, he began being invited to university activities. And the widow of one of his teachers at the University of Wisconsin turned up in Atlanta, after her retirement, and became a friend of my parents.

As we grew up, there were four of us. My sister Doris was born on the campus of the University of Wisconsin while my father was a student, and my sister Sarah was born on his first teaching job at Langston University in Oklahoma. So that three of the four were associated with universities. My brother was born in Atlanta after Dad had gone into business there.

As we grew up, we were constantly aware of some of the things that were not necessarily made available to us, because my parents tried ways of getting interesting people into the home by inviting them to dinner. So that if someone like Rayford Logan, who taught in Atlanta, was around, he would be invited to dinner. And we would sit around the dining room table with the grown-ups, listening to what they were saying and occasionally even taking part in the conversation.

I remember when the man who became president of Texas Southern University, the first black member of the Atomic Energy Commission, S. Milton Nabrit, was at our house for a while. While he and his wife were building a house, they took their meals at our house. We would talk about biological discoveries with him; he was then going to Woods Hole in the summers to do research. We would pick his brains regularly over the dinner table. And when a woman came from Alaska to Atlanta — it was the first person whom my parents found who had been to Alaska— she was invited to dinner and she talked about Alaska.

Now among the people who came were some Africans. There was an African student at Morehouse by the name of Balamu Mukasa, who died in the past three or four years in Uganda. But he was from Uganda; he was the first African that I got to know fairly well. He would tell us about his country, what it was like; it was many years before I got to see Uganda for myself. But I saw it through his eyes when I was a little girl and he was a college student at Morehouse.

As time went on, opportunities presented themselves. And my parents had encouraged us to find ways of using opportunities, and they believed that we could do almost anything.

We were not given the feeling that because we were black, certain things were not for us. They really made it seem possible. The first black CPA had been a student of my father's at Langston University, and when he came to Atlanta to set up an accounting business, he looked to my parents as his first acquaintances there. And I became one of his accounting students. I took accounting from him and thought very seriously of becoming a CPA myself. But when I went to Mount Holyoke, where they didn't have accounting, I went on into economics as my major, and I stayed there. So that's how my commitment to economics developed. I think that of all the influences, that family beginning of commitment to education and expectation that everyone would strive for excellence was the most basic.

Q: Beside the influence of your parents, can you name any others who were instrumental in shaping your life?

SMYTHE: A great many, because I married at 21, two years after I graduated from college, which was at that time considered very young. Teen-age marriages hadn't come into vogue then. Everyone was too busy trying to keep his/her head above water, economically. But my husband was convinced that contacts were the most important things to have. His family had not been as focused on higher education as mine had. They had taught him that education was a must but were not in a higher education community as mine were. But he got his influence through people that he came to know when he was a student at the YMCA in Pittsburgh, or whatever. So he said many times, it's terribly important to establish contacts, and contacts can be very important.

And I found them extremely helpful, because what they did was give me a sense of confidence that I could do what I wanted to do. I was encouraged in speech by Dr. Anne Cook Reed. for example, and Marion Wilson Starling, who taught me when I was a young girl at Spelman.

Later when I was a graduate student, I was influenced by five people who taught me and who seemed to have something that went beyond a casual interest. Those persons, including some schoolmates of mine, had an influence on me. Two of my fellow graduate students at Wisconsin were Walter Heller, who became chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisers in the 1960s, and Byron Johnson, who ran for Congress from Colorado and who was instrumental in getting the first black page admitted to the U.S. House of Representatives. So a good many of those contacts have been very helpful. One of our classmates married a man who later became director of the Stanford University Press, which published our book, The New Nigerian Elite, and they became warm friends — still are to this day.

When I got into foreign relations, then contacts began to multiply. I found myself on an advisory commission that had John Gardner as chairman; Father Hesburgh as a member; the chairman of the Executive Board of Time and Life, Roy Larsen was a member; Arnold Ricker, the Executive Vice President of United Artists, was a member; and Luther Foster, the president of Tuskegee Institute. Those contacts were very important and led to others.

When in 1964 President Johnson had to name a delegation to the General Conference of UNESCO, I was taken on that delegation, I believe, because I was on the Advisory Commission on Education and Cultural Affairs, and my name came to mind when it was suggested that it might be a good idea to have some members who were black and some members who were women.

I had my first experience at an international conference, and I made my first contact with a Cameroonian diplomat at that conference. We sat next to each other in a meeting. And he is now their Ambassador to West Germany. He has served in Moscow and in Peking. We had a grand reunion when he found out that I was Ambassador to his country, and he gave me a gift that he brought back from China, because he was then posted to China. We had a very cordial reunion.

But the chairman of that delegation was Senator Benton, the publisher of the Encyclopedia Britannica, and one of the originators of CU — one of the founders of the cultural affairs unit here in the Department of State. He was the first Assistant Secretary for Cultural, Education and Cultural Affairs. Senator Benton put me in touch with a number of people. It was through him that I met people like Mortimer Adler, Charles Van Doren, who were associated with the Great Book Series. I met Howard Swanson, the president of Encyclopedia Britannica. I met a number of people — Anna Rosenberg, Paul Hoffman. Senator Benton suggested that I become a member of the National Commission for UNESCO. And through that I met a number of people that I might not otherwise have known. I sat next to Ben Shahn in our meetings for a couple of years before he died, and it was interesting to talk to a painter of his calibre, whom I had known and read about. And we talked about a number of issues and were able to meet a great many people who were dealing with all sorts of educational and cultural exchange matters. For instance, Anna Chenault came on the Commission while I was there, and so did numerous other people.

So one thing led to another, and after a while, Senator Benton suggested that I come and serve as a consultant to Encyclopedia Britannica. And in 1969, I did that and found it extremely interesting to be part of a group of such people. I was invited to all board meetings. And so I met Anna Rosenberg, who had been Secretary of Labor, and Paul Hoffman, who had started off the United Nations Development Program, and so many people. Robert Maynard Hutchings, who had been president of the University of Chicago and the Center for Study of Democratic Institutions, and for that matter, Hubert Humphrey, the Vice President, who had just completed his term as Vice President of the United States. He was a member of that board. And these were the people with whom I was interacting in close quarters and having a chance to hear as they went about their daily affairs. Theodore White, who wrote The Making of a President, was a member of that board. So it was ... I could see the influence of contacts in moving from one thing to another. And I've thoroughly enjoyed that, and it has made a great difference in how I operate.

I'm not a person who uses power well, and I have not capitalized on people that I have known. But it has made life very interesting, and I have thoroughly enjoyed it.

Q: Are. there any things that you. would like to say before we complete this interview?

SMYTHE: I think at this point in my life ... I am officially leaving the Foreign Service; I'm not retiring from life at all, and I cannot consider myself retired for a long time to come. But I intend to do as much as I can to help build up some black institutions. I've been living in an integrated world much of my adult life, interacting with institutions which are often not, strictly speaking, black institutions. And one of the things I'd like to contribute to is some black institutions. I have accepted a place on the Board of Trustees of Spelman College, which was my first college alma mater, and will be working with them. They are to receive my collection of African art, which was one of my interests while I was overseas — I think I completely forgot to mention that. I spent a great deal of time in building up my art collection, and some pieces are quite lovely. And there are even a few rare pieces. So I look forward to making that a reality in Spelman.

Q: Ambassador Smythe, on behalf of the Phelps-Stokes Fund, I wish to thank you very deeply for your participation in what we consider to be a valuable oral history project on former Black Chiefs of Mission.

SMYTHE: Thank you. I think it's very important, because one thing I haven't mentioned is the number of young people who come through this office that I've been encouraging to join the Foreign Service. I still think it is a great opportunity for our young people, and I hope that many of them will serve as Chiefs of Mission in the years to come.

End of interview